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ABSTRACT

This book on an anti-bias approach to early childhood education addresses aspects of diversity such as gender, race, and language within Australian society and provides strategies for working with families and staff to challenge existing attitudes and practices. Key features of the book include case studies showing anti-bias principles in action, questions for discussion and references at the end of each chapter, and a glossary of key terms. The chapters are: (1) "Children and Bias" (Anne Glover); (2) "Creating an Anti-Bias Environment" (Rosemary Green); (3) "Cultural Diversity" (Mary Vajda); (4) "The Gender Factor" (Glenda MacNaughton); (5) "Responding to Special Needs" (Anne Palmer); (6) "Linguistic Diversity" (Leonie Arthur); (7) "Exploring Families; The Diversity and the Issues" (Elizabeth Dau); (8) "Cross-Cultural Challenges in Early Childhood Education" (Emione [Emmy] Kiriakou); (9) "'Men Should Not be Asked to Play Nursemaid to Young Children': Bias in the Workplace" (Margaret Clyde); (10) "Persona Dolls" (Ana Maria Hanley); (11) "Festivals, Holidays, and Community Celebrations: Do They Still Have a Place in Early Childhood Programs?" (Sally Barnes); (12) "Empowering Adults--A Personal Experience" (Veronica Johns); (13) "Parent and Family Focus: An Essential Ingredient" (Anne Stonehouse); (14) "Staff Development: Dealing with Diversity" (Barbara Creaser); and (15) "Developing an Anti-Bias Approach in Program Planning" (Anne Paul). (KDFB)

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The Anti-Bias Approach in Early Childhood

The Anti-Bias Approach in Early Childhood

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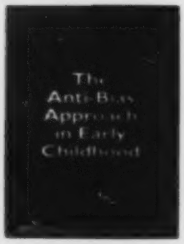

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Foreword

As members of the Anti-Bias Curriculum Task Force, it gives us great pleasure to write this foreword. We are on a common journey with the authors and consumers of this book; our ultimate destination a free, just and peaceful world for all. We share the goal of creating caregiving and educational environments which nurture children who, in the words of Banks (1995), are 'free to publicly affirm their own racial, ethnic, cultural, gender identification, [are] able to transcend their own cultural borders and reach beyond them, and [are] free to participate in action to make our society more democratic and free'.

Anti-bias education is needed wherever oppression sabotages the healthy development of children. The specific content, teaching methods and materials will vary to reflect the differing histories, populations, cultural dynamics and conditions of a particular country. The overall concept of anti-bias education moves easily across national borders. For example, the movement for bilingual education in both Australia and the United States shares common underlying dynamics even though the languages at the focus of the debate vary. In both cases, denying children the right to continue to develop their home languages while simultaneously learning their country's version of 'standard' English has the same damaging impact. Similarly, if a child's family and culture are invisible in the early childhood environment, that child's equal educational opportunity is sabotaged, whether the child is of American Indian or Australian Aboriginal background. Equally, confining all girls or boys to one way of acting, even if the specific rules vary, sets limits on a child's fullest potential.

Frederick Douglass, one of the key African American leaders of the struggle against slavery in the United States, wrote in 1847: 'We are one. Our cause is one. We must help each other if we are to succeed.' His words are as true today. It is vital that we acknowledge, support, learn from and build on each other's work. In so doing, we discover common issues and challenges and identify the particular strategies required to implement anti-bias education in the context of our own country's history, peoples and current realities. As we create situation-specific methods and content relevant to various settings, we deepen and extend our understanding of the underlying principles of anti-bias education. Thus, *The Anti-Bias Approach in Early Childhood* is an important contribution, not only for early childhood educators in Australia, but also for those of us implementing anti-bias education in the United States and elsewhere.

We are learning from our experiences that anti-bias work is much easier with children than with adults and early education systems. This lesson crosses national borders, which is not surprising: the very dynamics that make anti-bias education necessary also create the challenges to its implementation. These challenges have several recurring themes.

One challenge is the belief that learning about differences among people will make children prejudiced. This assumption ignores research about children's early interest in differences among people, and their early absorption of socially prevailing stereotypes and prejudice. Children do not enter our early childhood programs as 'blank slates' regarding the topic of diversity.

A second challenge is the assumption that multicultural and anti-bias education is primarily for children from non-English-speaking backgrounds. We believe that every child can benefit. Research tells us that every child's budding awareness and feelings about him or herself and others are damaged by racial and other forms of prejudice and discrimination. Anti-bias education is essential for all children to live and thrive in the 21st century.

A third challenge comes from teachers who are unwilling to add yet another component to the curriculum. In fact, anti-bias education involves integrating into, not adding onto, the existing curriculum. This requires a change in perspective rather than new methods and activities.

A fourth obstacle is the fear that teachers and administrators may have about other adults becoming hostile and ostracising colleagues or even firing them from their jobs.

Change requires persistence and patience with ourselves and others. Consequently, a commitment to anti-bias education is long-term. We must anticipate obstacles and work out strategies for educating teachers, administrators, parents and the community about the objectives and methods of anti-bias education. Involving everyone in all stages of the process will increase the support for anti-bias education. Remember Malcolm X's words: 'Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today'. (1992, p. 43)

Another type of challenge to multicultural and anti-bias education in the United States is political opposition from the more conservative elements of our society whose criticism rests mostly on distorted formulations of the goals of our work. One accusation is that anti-bias and multicultural education seeks to 'disunite' the United States. Underlying this view is the assumption that American society is already united, when in fact we are a deeply divided nation, grappling with unresolved, fundamental contradictions resulting from our history as a nation founded to create freedom for one group while also enslaving, colonising and oppressing others. Anti-bias and multicultural education seeks to prepare people who can build true unity. We dream of a nation in which all have a place at the table, and none are denied the right to the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness because of who they are. A second criticism from political opponents is that anti-bias education is 'anti family values' because it respects the reality of family diversity rather than insisting on one 'right' way for all to live. We see anti-bias education as pro family values because we support *all* the families we serve as early childhood educators — such support is a basic ethical mandate of our profession.

The struggle over multicultural and anti-bias education in the United States reflects the tensions between those who want to press forward towards creating a more open and equitable society and those who are desperate to maintain the status quo. People who have always been in control are frightened by the changing demographics in this country and are resistant to the idea that they might have to give up some of their economic and social power to groups which traditionally have been excluded. Others who are not in positions of power may resent the idea that they might have to change their ways of thinking and may not be able to see potential benefits to themselves resulting from educational and social change. In the face of uncertainty they yearn for the reassurance of familiarity and want to see their children going to the same schools and learning the same things that they did (Derman-Sparks and Ramsey, 1993).

Activism on our part is essential and it begins with ourselves. We must face and change our own misinformation and bias before we can ask others to do the same. We must embrace the same anti-bias objectives we set for children and work together to achieve them. This means:

- Constructing our own confident, knowledgeable self and group identity without denigrating others;
- Building informed, empathic and equitable relationships with people different from ourselves;
- Strengthening our ability to think critically about oppression in all its forms; and
- Acting in the face of injustice against ourselves and others.

This work cannot be done alone. As we seek to make anti-bias education an integral part of our daily work with children and families, it is vital to connect with others who have similar values and goals in our local communities, our nations and throughout the global community.

Finally, let us gain strength from the words of an acclaimed African American author: 'Keep in mind always the present you are constructing; it should be the future you want' (Walker 1989, p. 236).

Louise Derman-Sparks
ReGena Booze
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Pacific Oaks College
Pasadena, California

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Preface

Elizabeth: The chapters of the book are now complete and it only remains for us to write the preface. What would you expect to find in the preface to a book with the title *The Anti-Bias Approach in Early Childhood?* Remember, for some people this may be their first encounter with the term 'anti-bias'.

Barb: We need to define what anti-bias curriculum means and why we think it's important. We need to talk about the fact that bias, and oppression as a result of bias, occur in our society and that bias affects both adults and children. Anti-bias is an approach to teaching young children about human differences; that difference is acceptable and enriching; and bias is not healthy, as those discriminated against are denied the opportunity to develop to their full potential.

Elizabeth: Let's include Louise and the ABC Task Force's definition of anti-bias:

> *... an active/activist approach to challenging prejudice, stereotyping and the 'isms'. In a society in which institutional structures create and maintain sexism, racism and handicappism, it is not sufficient to be non-biased (and also highly unlikely), nor is it sufficient to be an observer. It is necessary for each individual to actively intervene, to challenge and counter the personal and institutional behaviours that perpetuate oppression.*

Some of the adults we have worked with in inservice sessions have been a little sceptical when we've suggested that there is bias all around us in our everyday experience. However, after opening up to the anti-bias approach, they have come back to subsequent sessions reporting that they were amazed to find bias within their families, among their colleagues and in their social settings.

Barb: Yes, they go out to dinner with a group of friends and find that they are in the midst of jokes about the Irish, or racist discussion about Aborigines. We found, once we became aware, that there were many occasions when we felt we needed to bring the bias to people's attention. In centres and preschools, we have noticed instances of bias with both adults and children.

Elizabeth: Remember the girl we got on video-tape, who was playing at bathing the babies with a small group of four year-olds. They had white dolls and black dolls that they were washing in a tub with soap and face washers. She picked up the black doll and said, 'Mmmm, you'll take a long time.' Her comment indicated that she thought black babies (or people) were dirtier than white babies. The child may have been showing us that she didn't understand that skin colour was not an indicator of cleanliness.

Barb: Or that she thought the skin colour could be washed off.

Elizabeth: Her remark, and her emerging understanding, might be reinforced, negatively, by the adult ignoring it, or positively, by the adult talking to the child about different skin colours and how all skin colours are acceptable.

Barb: I am often confronted by people in charge of child care staff teams calling them 'my girls'. What a patronising put-down that sounds. I still hear the word 'ladies' used. And we recently saw that advertisement for child care staff asking for 'cuddly' people to apply. It seems that there is sexism in our own field that needs confronting before we can even begin to tackle work with the children.

Elizabeth: We need to be sure that readers of this book know about Louise's book. We have thought of this as a companion volume, but it really builds on *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children* and it would be best if people read that first.

Barb: Yes, I agree. This book extends *Anti-Bias Curriculum* and adds an Australian dimension.

Barbara Creaser
Elizabeth Dau

About the Editors

Barbara Creaser (1940–1995), Dip. T. (KTC), Dip. Child Development, M.A. in Human Development, held positions including Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education and Child Care Studies at the Northern Territory University, Advisor to preschools with the Kindergarten Union of South Australia, and various appointments in South Australian, interstate and overseas preschools. In Canberra, Barbara carried out the accreditation training for the long day care centres in the ACT and worked as a consultant in child care and early childhood education.

This book is dedicated to her memory.

Elizabeth Dau, Dip. Teach., B. Ed., is Head of the Child Care Department at the Canberra Institute of Technology. Her previous positions include various posts in the ACT school system, Assistant National Director of the Australian Early Childhood Association, a position that gave her a national view of child care and education, and Program Manager of the Northern Territory Children's Services Resource and Advisory Program, a program which supported child care services throughout the Territory.

Both Barbara and Elizabeth participated in anti-bias curriculum courses conducted by the faculty of the Pacific Oaks College in California and co-authored *Who's in Charge of Celebrations? A Child Centred Approach*, published by the Australian Early Childhood Association.

Elizabeth Jones, Consulting Editor, holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Southern California and an M.A. in Child Development from the University of Wisconsin. She has taught preschool, primary and tertiary students. She has also written and consulted in early childhood education and human development. Dr Jones is on the faculty of Pacific Oaks College in Pasadena, California.

Dr Jones's publications include: *Emergent Curriculum*, with John Nimmo; *The Play's the Thing: Teachers' Roles in Children's Play*, with Gretchen Reynolds; and *Growing Teachers: Partnerships in Staff Development*, *Teaching Adults: An Active Learning Approach and Dimensions of Teaching — Learning Environments*, with Elizabeth Prescott.

About the Contributors

Leonie Arthur, B. Ed. (Early Childhood), M. Ed. (Applied Linguistics) lectures at the University of Western Sydney in the Early Childhood program, teaching subjects that include Diversity, Bilingualism and Children's Language Development as well as aspects of planning and programming. Her current study is focusing on early literacy development. Leonie's experience in the early childhood field includes working with Aboriginal children and their families in the Northern Territory and Sydney, and working with children, families and staff from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in Sydney.

Sally Barnes, Dip. T. (ECE), B. Early Childhood Education (Inservice), is employed as Director at Sir Thomas Playford Kindergarten in the northern suburbs of Adelaide. Over the past six years, Sally has worked in a diverse range of settings — from Woomera, a joint American and Australian military base in South Australia, to a two-year period working on a mobile kindergarten in the mid-north areas of the State. She is committed to the principles of social justice and has a particular interest in the needs of caravan park communities and Anglo-Australian children living in mono-racial and monocultural communities. She is currently involved in a pilot project which has linked city and rural preschools to develop anti-bias networks.

Margaret Clyde, B.A., M. Ed., T. Cert., is Associate Professor in Early Childhood Studies at the University of Melbourne. She has taught children aged three to eight years in New South Wales and has lectured in NSW, ACT and Victorian tertiary institutes. She edited the *Australian Journal of Early Childhood* for over a decade, and has published nationally and internationally in areas including curriculum design, the neophyte teacher, the skills and attitudes of child care directors, and the attitude of the early childhood field to male early childhood workers.

Margaret is recognised as an advocate for young children and their families and is a proponent for the rights and career opportunities for early childhood practitioners. She has been a member of various government committees including the Federal Minister's Advisory Council on Children's Services and the Interim Accreditation Council.

Anne Glover, Dip. T. (KTC), B. Ed., Grad. Dip. Parent Education and Counselling, M.A., has worked in the early childhood field for more than 20 years. She is currently a Senior Lecturer in the de Lissa Institute of Early Childhood and Family Studies at the University of South Australia.

Anne has made a particular commitment to innovative tertiary courses which have addressed inequities in tertiary education. In the 1980s, she coordinated the University of South Australia's nationally recognised

Aboriginal Early Childhood Education Program for rural Aboriginal students. Her research activities have focused on issues related to racism, ethnicity and Aboriginality. Current research includes *The Early Childhood Service Needs of Aboriginal Communities* (funded by the South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Advisory Committee), the experiences of bi-racial children and the development of anti-bias environments.

Rosemary Green, Cert. Group Work, Assoc. Dip. Lib. St., B. Ed., is an Advanced Skills Teacher in the early childhood field in South Australia. She has taught in classrooms from Reception (the first year of school) to Year 2, including vertically grouped classes. She is currently the preschool teacher in the Child/Parent Centre at Northfield Primary School. Her interest in anti-bias education stems from previous roles as Key Teacher, Equal Opportunities and Key Teacher, Multiculturalism in Education, and a commitment to social justice. Rosemary is completing work for a Master of Education with a thesis on transition to school.

Ana Maria Hanley has most recently worked at the Lady Gowrie Child Centre in Sydney where she was particularly interested in encouraging children to develop strategies for expressing feelings and confronting bias through the use of persona dolls.

In her native Uruguay, Ana Maria worked in a residential home for emotionally disturbed children. She worked with children aged 5 to 15 years and used play therapy and psychodrama, although at the time she didn't have labels for her methods. She came to Australia in 1976. She has involved herself in inservice training, including Train the Trainer courses, how to recognise and report child abuse, and counselling.

Veronica Johns holds an Associate Diploma in Child Care Studies from the Darwin Institute of Technology, now the Northern Territory University. She currently works at the NT Children's Services Resource and Advisory Program in Darwin as the Aboriginal Children's Services Co-ordinator. She has held various positions in early childhood services, including Aboriginal Supplementary Services Worker and relief carer, and in a holiday program offering a multicultural focus. She is co-author of a booklet about Aboriginal families in child care, designed for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and to help staff in mainstream services develop a deeper understanding and respect for Aborigines.

Emione (Emmy) Kiriakou, Dip. T. (ECE), B. Sp. Ed., is an early childhood practitioner in South Australia and is a de Lissa scholarship holder. She has a strong interest in cross-cultural communication in early childhood, which has resulted in extensive study of this field both in Australia and the United States. Emione is currently completing a Master of Arts (in Multicultural Studies) at Flinders University in South Australia.

Glenda MacNaughton, Dip. T. (KTC), B. Ed., Grad. Dip. ECE, is a lecturer at Melbourne University's Faculty of Education Department of Early Childhood Studies at Kew. She has worked both as a practitioner and manager in a variety of early childhood services, including four years as a senior policy adviser on child care initiatives for the Greater London Council and the Inner London Education Authority. Her research and writing interests include early childhood curriculum theory and practice, with a special emphasis on anti-bias perspectives. She is co-author (with J. Faragher) of *Working with Young Children* and is currently completing a doctorate examining the construction of gender in the early childhood curriculum.

Anne Palmer, Dip. T. (ECE), lectures at the Central Metropolitan College of TAFE in Perth. She is a board member of the Resource Unit for Children with Special Needs and has presented training programs for support workers, integration assistants and child care workers. She was previously the early childhood teacher on a multidisciplinary early intervention team for children with cerebral palsy and multiple disabilities. This involved supporting integration of children with high support needs into mainstream children's services and supporting teachers, care givers, children and their families.

Anne's experience of having a hearing impairment, the children she cared for and her two very special brothers have led to many experiences of people reacting with discomfort, pity and lack of understanding when people either have needs or appearances that make them different.

Anne Paul, Dip. T. (ECE), Grad. Dip. Ed., is undertaking further study while employed at Swinburne University (TAFE Division) in the Department of Child Studies and Health. Anne is teaching in the Associate Diploma of Social Science (Child Care) course, a position she has held since 1989. She has developed curriculum content on anti-bias issues for a bridging program, and presents inservice and staff development on anti-bias programming and anti-bias issues. Previously Anne was a kindergarten teacher in inner Melbourne, working with children and families from diverse social and cultural backgrounds.

Anne Stonehouse, B.A. (Psychology), M.A. (Child Psychology), is currently Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education, Northern Territory University, Darwin. She is Past President of the Australian Early Childhood Association and was convenor of the National Working Party that developed the code of ethics for the early childhood profession. She has published widely in the area of early childhood development, education and care. Some major publications include: *Opening the Doors; Trusting Toddlers; Ourselves in Their Shoes; How Does It Feel? Child Care from a Parent's Perspective* and *Not Just Nice Ladies*.

Mary Vajda, M. Ed., B. Ed., Dip. T. (KTC), Dip. R.E., has been involved in all facets of early childhood education and training. Mary has worked in child care, kindergartens, preschools, pre-primary and junior primary classes. She was Senior Lecturer in Child Care at the Central Metropolitan College of TAFE in Perth and was also on secondment to Edith Cowan University, Joondalup Campus, where she was lecturing in the Bachelor of Social Science (Children Studies) and Graduate Diploma of Social Science (Children Studies) courses. Mary is currently lecturing at the College of Education at the University of Notre Dame Australia in Fremantle, which is one of Australia's newest universities.

Acknowledgements

From the outset we were encouraged by Louise Derman-Sparks and Elizabeth (Betty) Jones to go ahead with an anti-bias book which would be a complementary volume to *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children* and would present an Australian perspective. Betty's assistance continued right through the writing process as she reviewed each chapter and sent us comments. Louise, with Cheryl Greer and ReGena Booze (members of the Anti-Bias Curriculum Task Force and our teachers when we did the anti-bias course through Pacific Oaks College), agreed to write the foreword, a further boost to our determination to achieve our goal.

Very special thanks are due to these people, our mentors.

Many people helped us with photographs, but we would especially like to thank Cathy Laudenbach, photographer, and the families who agreed to the inclusion of their photos in the book. We would also like to thank the children, families and staff of Possum Magic Day Care Centre and Southside Campus Child Care Centre for allowing us to take photos and for giving consent for them to be used to illustrate the text.

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Finally, thanks to the HarperEducational team who have been especially supportive in the way they have kept us on track. We do want to single out Debbie Lee for special thanks for her bubbling energy and enthusiasm and the wonderful way she has led us through what originally felt like a daunting project.

Introduction

This book is the result of the Australian–Pacific Oaks College connection. A number of Australians have studied at the College in Pasadena, California, and others met Louise Derman-Sparks and Elizabeth (Betty) Jones when they visited Australia in 1991. Some of these people have been influenced by the anti-bias approach developed by Derman-Sparks and the Anti-Bias Curriculum (ABC) Task Force. We, too, have come under that influence.

The multicultural approach had been very successful in encouraging pride in one's own culture and respect for other cultures, but it did not cover acceptance and valuing of the broader range of minority groups. There was a perceived need to take the multicultural process a step further so that there is acceptance of, not only cultural groups and differences within those cultural groups, but also of other minority groups.

The anti-bias approach says that differences are natural, that differences are good, but that oppression because of those differences is not to be tolerated. Oppression occurs because of bias that is expressed through racism, elitism, sexism, homophobia, handicappism and ageism. Leonie Arthur in Chapter 6, 'Linguistic Diversity', has added another bias: 'linguicism', where people who speak differently are discriminated against because of the way they speak. All these biases mean that people who are of a different race, who are poor, who have a different sexual preference, who are challenged by disability, who are elderly or who speak differently are excluded from equal opportunity in our society.

Bias usually arises from ignorance or fear. It usually has to do with feelings of superiority. Bias is passed from adults to children. It has a great deal to do with people being different — unchangeable. For example, our own culture, values and attitudes are acceptable, but people from other cultures with different values and attitudes are not, unless they reject their own cultural values and adopt ours.

The Anti-Bias Approach in Early Childhood has contributors from several States and Territories, and from diverse personal backgrounds and experiences. The common bond is their interest in promoting an anti-bias approach.

Bias exists in our society and this bias is illustrated, for example, by Glover, Vajda, Palmer, Arthur and Johns. Chapters by MacNaughton, Clyde and Stonehouse point clearly to the bias that exists within the early childhood field and the need to confront it and take action. Many of us are already taking action, and examples are contained in the chapters by Green, Hanley and Barnes, who are influencing children. Some of us are endeavouring to encourage the adults who work with young children (Dau, Stonehouse and Paul) to acknowledge the biases that exist, including their own, and to realise that children learn prejudice not from people who are different, but from contact with the socially prevailing attitudes. All children have that contact!

We need to help children become comfortable with diversity. The early childhood years are the best for assisting children to see the world, not only through their eyes but from the perspective of others.

The purpose of this book, then, is to put the anti-bias approach into an Australian (and later we hope an Australasian) context. We believe the contributors will open readers' minds and cause them to examine their own biases and the biases of others. Readers might see with new eyes, through a new lens, the biases in society which put negative values on human differences. We hope the book will inspire readers to take action.

Many of us have felt isolated and ridiculed because we have taken a stand on the anti-bias approach, but since 40 per cent of our population is born overseas (as reported on 'Sunday', WIN TV, on 5 February 1995), there is every reason for us to confront bias, eliminate discrimination and encourage all people, both children and adults, to feel confident, competent and comfortable in dealing with diversity.

CHAPTER
1

Children and Bias

ANNE GLOVER

Children growing up in Australia are exposed to enormous diversity. Australians are not a homogeneous group; we are people who differ in all aspects of our identity. We differ, for example, in our gender, race, ethnicity, cultural heritage, mental and physical ability, age, religion and socio-economic level. There is a considerable amount of research which demonstrates that children are aware of the differences among people, and that they learn the prevailing social attitudes towards these differences at a very young age. When attitudes are negative, they can result in children expressing or acting out bias towards an individual or group.

This chapter discusses the development of bias in young children and highlights the important role of an anti-bias curriculum in helping all children to develop positive attitudes towards diversity.

Young children's awareness of diversity

Many adults like to believe that young children are innocent, that they are free from bias and prejudice, and that they do not make evaluative judgements about people different from themselves.

It is not uncommon to hear adults claim that children don't even notice difference. Usually we hear these comments about children 'not noticing', when people are discussing the more sensitive aspects of identity such as race or physical and mental ability; they are less common when children's awareness of gender or age is being discussed. For example, while most adults would readily agree that a four year-old observes the obvious differences between a baby, a teenager and a great-grandfather, they are less likely to agree that the same four year-old would notice the differences between an Anglo-Australian, an Asian-Australian and an Indian-Australian. If questioned further, adults may say that of course the four year-old notices the physical differences — what is meant by 'not noticing' is that children do not *care about* the difference, that it is not meaningful.

Such claims are contradicted by the growing body of research evidence showing that young children do notice difference, and that these observations carry meaning with them. (See, for example, Katz, 1976; Milner, 1983; Henshall & McGuire, 1986; Aboud, 1988; Ramsey & Myers, 1990; Palmer, 1990.) As children become aware of difference, they simultaneously develop positive or negative feelings about each difference they observe. A study of two- and three-year-old children carried out to explore the development of race awareness and racial attitudes in young children clearly illustrated how early this occurs. The study recorded the following:

- Children noticed and commented on skin colour, hair and eye colour, and hair texture. They talked about their own colour and commented on similarities and differences in each other, in dolls, in stimulus pictures and in figures illustrating picture books.
- Children used racial cues to identify and classify themselves and others.
- As the children practised their categorisation and classification skills using race as a basis, many incidences of overgeneralisation occurred.
- Children explored various aspects of race, including the extent and permanency of racial attributes (particularly skin colour) and the relationship between race and gender.
- Preferences decided on the basis of racial cues were also evident. For example, all children showed same-race preference more than other-race preference when selecting dolls to wash or dolls from the doll families.

Analysis of the observations recorded indicated that most of the two year-olds used racial cues as a basis of identification and categorisation. The value attached to the cues, and the value distinctions which were developing, were more difficult to observe. However, two of the children, one as young as two years and four months, were observed exhibiting behaviours which clearly indicated the beginnings of negative racial attitudes — for example, refusing to hold different-race children's hands, never choosing different-race dolls and only choosing same-race pictures for collages (Glover, 1991).

Like children all over the world, Australian children are aware of, and interested in, human diversity from a very young age. Initially, they notice and are curious about our visible differences — sex, race, body shape and physical abilities. In time they begin to notice other differences, including ethnicity, culture and class. Children aged between two and five years have been documented commenting on and asking questions about gender differences, physical differences, cultural differences including language, foods and celebrations, and physical abilities, often focusing on adaptive equipment such as splints, glasses and wheelchairs.

While it is not known exactly when children first observe identity differences, evidence suggests that most children appear to notice gender and racial cues during infancy. (See, for example, Katz, 1976.) By the time they are three or four, most children are aware of the concepts of race and gender, many can identify and categorise people by racial group, and nearly all can use appropriate gender labels. They are also aware of differences in physical ability, body shape, and particular cultural practices and events.

Anecdotes collected in Australian early childhood services provide many examples of young children's awareness of human diversity. Consider the following three examples:

Jackie, a white five year-old, is speaking to Kate, the Aboriginal student teacher.

Jackie: You're from another country.

Kate: Why do you say that?

Jackie: Cos you've got brown skin.

Kate: Well, I'm not from another country.

Jackie: Yes, you are. You've got brown skin.

Kate: No, I'm from Australia.

Jackie: No, you're not.

……

'Look at the black man', said four-year-old Rebecca, pointing to the African male who had entered the kindergarten building. 'Whose daddy is he?' Still looking, she asks: 'Has he got a black penis?'

……

On the day that Anna Louise's artificial leg had to be taken to the city to be repaired, Anna Louise arrived at kindergarten riding her specially built bike.

Sean: Why has she brought her bike?

Eloise: Where's her other leg?

Ms T: Well, you know that Anna Louise has only one real leg. Yesterday her artificial leg broke, and her Mum's taken it into the city to get it fixed. Anna Louise brought her bike so that she can move around and join in all the activities.

Each of the above examples demonstrates children noticing differences, which is an essential part of the process of socialisation. In the context of social interactions, children notice similarities and differences, realise that they are distinct from other people and develop a sense of identity, as they categorise self and others, learning to which groups they do or do not belong.

As children become aware of our differences, they also develop feelings about what they are observing. These feelings are referred to as evaluative judgements. Children make judgements about what they see, evaluating differences as good (positive) or bad (negative). When the judgements are negative, we say that children have developed a bias.

Judgements are made because children's awareness of diversity develops in a social context. In Australian society, as in most societies, a framework of values is already operating — racism, sexism, and age, disability and class discrimination exist. This framework indicates to children that some differences are valued, some are not, and children continually receive messages, both directly and indirectly, which tell them what is valued, and therefore good, and what is not, and therefore bad.

As a result of the messages they receive, children learn the prevailing social attitudes towards these differences. By the time they are seven or eight, many have developed gender and race bias, bias against the disabled, cultural/lifestyle bias, socioeconomic (or class) bias, and bias against those who do not conform to society's view of attractiveness, which includes having a certain body shape.

Two recent Australian studies (Palmer, 1986; Harper & Bonanno, 1993) provide vivid examples of young children making evaluative judgements based on racial characteristics. Palmer's study examined the attitudes that non-Aboriginal children were developing towards Aborigines. All the four year-olds in the study, which was undertaken in rural South Australia, were shown to be making racial evaluations, the majority of which were negative in their racial orientation. Comments such as 'Blackfellas dirty' were not uncommon.

In Harper and Bonanno's study, preschool and kindergarten children were reported as saying, 'You're the colour of poo' . . . 'Did your Mum drop you in the poo?' . . . 'Rack off, wog. We don't want to play with you' . . . 'Must have been born in a toilet, cos you look like poo.'

While it is both disturbing and distressing to hear children talk like this, and to see young children excluding, bullying or teasing others, it is important to recognise that attitudes can be changed and that the learning which creates bias and prejudice can be challenged.

Learning to be biased

Children are not born with biases. They do not come into the world already discriminating against certain individuals and groups. Children learn to be biased, and much of this learning occurs during their early years. During this time, as part of the complex process of socialisation and enculturation, they become aware of the various social groups which make up Australian society and make judgements about each group's distinguishing characteristics. These judgements are important determinants of the later attitudes and behaviours which lead individuals to treat others differently (and unequally) on the basis of race, gender, age, ability, religion and cultural heritage.

While the development of negative attitudes and bias is undoubtedly a dynamic, complex and multifaceted process, one of the most common ways children learn to be biased is by observing existing behaviours and experiencing the effects of attitudes towards various groups in society (Byrnes, 1988). All of the socialising agencies with which the child interacts — parents and other family members, carers and teachers, schools, literature and the mass media — will contribute to this process.

The role of the family and significant others

Parents, siblings, extended family members, friends, carers and teachers all play an important role in the development of children's attitudes. Each helps to define and explain the child's world, and in doing so gives the child messages about 'how things are' — how 'we' think about things, how 'we' do things and, ultimately, who 'we' are (Milner, 1983, p. 57). Together, they provide the information from which children construct meaning as they attempt to make sense of their world. Within this context, children gradually become aware of the surrounding values and attitudes and usually reproduce them as their own.

According to Milner (1983), the family is the most powerful transmission agent. He suggests that it transmits values and attitudes using three processes — direct tuition, indirect tuition and role-learning.

1. ***Direct tuition*** In most Australian families, parents or other family members such as a grandparent usually provide a great deal of direct tuition. They tell children what is 'right' and what is 'wrong'. They do this for individual acts (for example, not letting their children play with 'the Indian kids who live down the road') and social, moral or political issues (for example, beliefs about immigration).
2. ***Indirect tuition*** Families also transmit values and attitudes indirectly, with the teaching occurring unconsciously and unintentionally. There are a number of ways children learn through this process, including identification and modelling. Identification involves children spontaneously imitating a parent's integrated pattern of behaviour, while modelling occurs when children purposefully model their behaviour on that of the parent.
3. ***Role-learning*** Role-learning involves teaching children who they are and how to behave in the world, how to behave towards others, and an understanding of the roles of others. To achieve this, children must acquire a social identity, which they do in the context of their 'own group' and its relationship to other groups.

As Milner says, each of these processes teaches children not only ways of doing things, but also ways of seeing or evaluating the world. Parents and significant others in children's lives are central to this learning, as 'they are the interpreters and instructors' (Milner, 1983, p. 67). It is important to acknowledge here that parents can contribute either positively or negatively to the development of attitudes, depending on how they themselves evaluate and respond to other groups.

The role of early childhood services and schools

Places such as child care centres, kindergartens and schools, where children may spend large parts of their day, will also contribute significantly to the development of attitudes and bias. As with families, services can contribute either positively or negatively. The contribution becomes negative when environments do not give children positive messages about diversity — when, for example, resources and materials such as books, posters, dolls and dramatic play adjuncts ignore, stereotype or diminish certain groups of people.

According to the Inner London Education Authority (1985), materials facilitate bias against groups through invisibility, tokenism and/or low status presentation.

1. ***Invisibility*** Groups are not represented in the materials. *Example (a)*: Characters who are physically disabled are not visible in books, posters or picture displays. *Example (b)*: There are no black dolls in the dramatic play area.
2. ***Tokenism*** Groups are represented, but not authentically. They are there 'just for show'. *Example (a)*: There may be just one picture of a black person amongst the people collage being displayed. *Example (b)*: There is just one black doll.
3. ***Status*** In resources such as posters and books where images of work are presented, only some groups of people are shown occupying positions that are regarded in Australian society as being of high status. *Example (a)*: None of the books show people with disabilities undertaking capable or central roles. *Example (b)*: Images of the elderly only depict them in sedentary roles.

Each of these — invisibility, tokenism and status — gives children strong messages about which human qualities, and therefore which groups, are important and valued in the centre and which are not. These messages are fitted into the child's evaluative frame of reference, created previously when the child 'absorbed a simple polarised evaluation of the groups involved, so that one is positive, good and liked, the other negative, bad and disliked' (Milner, 1983, p. 110).

Resources also foster bias when they present only a narrow range of lifestyles, when they do not show people from a wide range of geographic, social and cultural backgrounds, or when they omit images of the range of family groupings which exist in Australia. Bias is fostered, too, when materials present children with stereotypic images — for example, when Aboriginality is only presented as Aboriginal men with spears and the full range of contemporary Aboriginal lifestyles is not shown, or when materials and/or activities such as 'dot painting' trivialise important activities undertaken by particular groups.

While resources and materials play an extremely important role, the adult's role is critical. Lane (1988, p. 193) makes this point strongly:

> *It is no good having black dolls if black people themselves are not valued, if racist remarks and graffiti are not recognised and challenged,*

> *if factual questions about racial differences are not answered correctly, if no attempt is made to find out what children are learning, feeling, believing and if strategies are not devised to openly discuss with children, in ways they can understand, why racism is wrong.*

At times, adults working with young children may unintentionally foster bias. This can occur when adults:

- Make assumptions about what is common to children and their families, implying that there is one right way to live, to behave, to talk and to think, rather than many ways;
- Avoid answering children's questions about diversity ('we don't talk about those things') or respond uncomfortably ('skin colour doesn't matter, we're all the same underneath'), suggesting that there is something 'wrong' with the differences observed; or
- Use language which excludes particular groups ('policeman' rather than 'police-officer') or use words which are rich in connotative meaning (black, white, old, broken) in negative ways.

The way early childhood services are structured will also give children powerful messages. Structuring includes who works in the service. Do staff represent the diversity of race, gender, age and ability which exists in the community? Who holds the power and makes the decisions about what is done in the service and how it is done?

Children will absorb all kinds of misinformation and stereotypes, both by what they see and hear, and what they don't see and hear, as they participate in early childhood programs. Silencing children, responding uncomfortably when they notice difference, suggesting that there is only one right way to be in the world, using discriminatory language and not presenting children with role models representing diversity, all facilitate the development of bias as children adopt the dominant group's view of the world, rather than create their own.

The role of the mass media

Most young Australian children are exposed to a great deal of print, pictures and television through which they receive messages about their social world. The media provide for them both cognitive and emotional information about the social meanings available in the wider society, for constructing and interpreting racial, cultural and other differences (Goodall et al., 1990). As with materials and resources used in early childhood services, persuasive messages are sent when groups are not represented (or are represented in a tokenistic way), when they are portrayed stereotypically or when they fill only low status positions. For example, a study of Australian mass media undertaken in 1990 by Goodall et al. reported Aboriginal representation as very limited. According to the report, Aboriginal Australians are

> *regularly associated with criminality, portrayed as self-destructive, [and] their politics factionalised . . . Their voices are rarely heard, they are rarely given the opportunity to speak for themselves, and are constantly interpreted to the wider community (and themselves) through white authorities. (p. 61)*

Ethnic minorities were also found to be portrayed in very restricted ways. 'Almost irrespective of the genre, Australian-produced material locates ethnic minorities in subordinate positions, or in caricature.' (p. 61)

In addition, information conveyed about societal norms, values, attitudes and beliefs can preserve traditional norms which are biased and discriminatory.

With television, in particular, playing an ever-increasing role in children's lives, it is essential to attend to the messages about diversity which it conveys. Australian children have many opportunities to observe and develop bias as they watch television. For example, children will see relatively few women in positions of political power, and fewer women occupying authoritative positions generally. They will see few individuals from ethnic minorities and few who are physically disabled.

Consider the following extract from the Goodall et al. study:

> *In 195 hours of television over a one week period, we recorded 2771 product advertisements. Of these, only 46 different ads, (repeated to make a total of 127), included any 'minority characters'. Many of these were 'comic ethnic stereotypes' — particularly prevalent in food advertising — usually played by Anglo actors. The majority of TV ads that did include people from non-Anglo backgrounds represented foreigners, rather than non-Anglo Australians. Out of all these advertisements, only one 1 second image of Aboriginal people appeared (three times). (p. 47)*

The researchers concluded that:

> *The overwhelming majority of advertisements representing Australia exclude anyone of non-Anglo descent. In looking at how non-Anglo Australians are presented, exclusion is the most significant factor. Advertisers are marketing a false self-image to Australians, that largely denies cultural plurality. Aboriginal people and culture are presented only as tourist commodities, and non-Anglo immigrants are presented in an often racist, stereotyped manner if they appear at all. (p. 51)*

Because children are in the early stages of their cognitive development, they attend more to the observable features of groups than the internal attributes. As a consequence, they are particularly susceptible to evaluative biases about racial groups different from their own, about those who are disabled, those who do not conform to society's view of physical attractiveness, the elderly, or those who have lifestyles different from the significant people in their world. When any of these groups, or individuals from groups, are represented negatively or stereotypically, or when they are underrepresented or not represented at all, bias will flourish.

Challenging bias

Bias is, as Lynch (1987, p. 34) says, 'not only unjust to those to whom it is directed, but is also inimical to the basic ethic of a culturally pluralistic society'. If we are to build a just society, in which 'everyone has a fair go' (a basic Australian tenet), then we must challenge bias where it has its roots — in early childhood. This will involve the following processes — promoting positive attitudes towards diversity, modifying negative attitudes, challenging stereotypes, fostering children's critical thinking about bias, and giving all children the courage and skills to act against bias.

While there is a good deal of research and literature about how children develop bias, there is much less research focusing on the above processes, especially those which challenge or modify children's attitudes.

Pate (1988) lists the following as approaches which have been trialled in the United States:

- *Audiovisual approaches* — using films and television to help children recognise bias.
- *Approaches using specific materials* — using books, plays and dolls specifically designed to enable children to identify and empathise with certain individuals.
- *Cognitive approaches* — helping children to develop higher thinking skills to avoid overgeneralising and stereotyping.
- *Cooperative learning approaches* — setting up cooperative learning situations so that children share common problems, goals, tasks and success with individuals from groups other than their own.
- *Human relations training* — fostering positive intergroup relations through specific training.
- *Direct approaches* — telling children what is the 'right' thing to say or do.
- *Whole school approaches* — changing school or centre structures and conditions to reflect and promote diversity, implementing multicultural curricula and using multicultural materials.
- *Self-esteem approaches* — developing children's positive self-concept and increasing self-esteem, since it is known that the higher a person's self-esteem the less likely they are to be prejudiced against others.

Many of these approaches are currently being used in early childhood services throughout Australia. More common is a program which combines various approaches and which is usually labelled multicultural education.

Recently, multicultural education has been the subject of a good deal of criticism. Critics argue that while it may attempt to challenge bias and promote positive attitudes, it easily becomes trivialised and tokenistic. Opportunities for children to 'learn about cultures' become centred on cultural artefacts such as language, food, music, clothing and celebrations, without developing children's understanding of the values and beliefs which inform these. Children can become exposed to the exotic aspects of culture in ways that take pieces of culture out of context, far removed from the everyday experiences of groups. This leads children naturally to stereotyping individual members of the particular cultural groups about whom they are learning. For example, dot painting with young children will expose them to one form of Aboriginal art, but what does it really tell children about the everyday experiences of Aboriginal Australians? And how does it show children the diversity which exists between and within Aboriginal communities? On countless occasions when non-Aboriginal children are asked about Aboriginal Australians, their responses relate to aspects of traditional lifestyles, spears, hunting, wiltjas and so on. Their stereotypic, often inaccurate responses are not challenged by single activities such as dot painting or making didgeridoos from cardboard cylinders.

Critics also argue that introducing children to cultural diversity does not necessarily result in the social harmony desired in Australia. For example, in an early childhood program catering for Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian children, will the introduction of some aspects of Chinese culture such as celebrating Chinese New Year result in (a) the Chinese-Australian children developing positive self-images, (b) the Anglo-Australian children learning to appreciate difference and, ultimately, (c) people living side-by-side harmoniously? Critics assert that it will not, and argue that focusing on cultural differences, rather than the unequal power relationships which exist between groups, will not decrease bias and discrimination.

This is not to say that multicultural education has not had an important role to play in promoting positive attitudes towards diversity and challenging negative attitudes and bias. As Derman-Sparks (1992, p. 115) states:

> *The philosophy of multicultural curriculum was an important step forward in its recognition that children grow up in diverse cultural contexts that must be brought into and respected in the classroom and in its intention to teach children to appreciate different ways of living.*

Many adults working with young children now believe that the most effective way to challenge bias is to implement an anti-bias approach. Developed in the United States, the anti-bias approach extends multicultural education, with its additional emphasis on teaching young children to recognise and challenge bias. Its framework is a developmentally appropriate curriculum which aims to provide every child with opportunities to:

- Construct a knowledgeable, confident self-identity;
- Develop comfortable, empathic and just interactions with diversity; and
- Develop critical thinking skills and the skills for standing up for oneself and others in the face of injustice.

An anti-bias curriculum combines many of the approaches listed by Pate (1988). It includes using specific resources and materials, helping children to develop higher thinking skills, fostering self-esteem, changing structures and, at times, employing a direct approach.

An anti-bias curriculum fits well with what we understand about how young children develop bias. It recognises that young children are learning about themselves and others, and that they do this through categorising 'the self' and the people in their world. Categorising involves learning to which group they do or do not belong — for example, I'm black, you're white; I'm a girl, you're a boy; I'm young, you're old; I'm in a wheelchair, your legs work — and an anti-bias curriculum acknowledges this as an important part of children's socialisation. It also recognises that the construction of categories is done in a world where some groups are more valued than others.

All children need to construct a knowledgeable, confident self-identity and group identity irrespective of how the dominant society views their group and their particular distinguishing characteristics. All children also need to feel comfortable with groups other than their own. They can achieve these essential goals when an anti-bias curriculum is implemented. An anti-bias curriculum challenges bias and promotes diversity by the construction of an environment for young children which:

- Reflects diversity positively through resources and materials (for example, books, posters, dolls, dramatic play adjuncts and music). Groups are represented, stereotypes are not perpetuated and offensive visual images such as golliwogs are not used. Images are accurate, and sensitive religious and cultural values are considered;
- Provides activities which encourage children to comment on aspects of diversity. Children are encouraged to explore and ask questions about the differences they notice, and their questions are answered accurately and honestly, in ways commensurate with their level of understanding;
- Provides experiences which give children contact with members of diverse groups. This may include carefully planned and monitored excursions, exchanges with other services, the inclusion of professionals (for example, doctors/dentists/health workers) from racial and ethnic minorities, and the employment of staff representing diversity;
- Challenges all negative attitudes and behaviours. Any bias or discriminatory behaviour demonstrated by staff, children and parents is confronted, regardless of how uncomfortable this may be. When discriminatory

behaviour is ignored, children get the message that it is acceptable behaviour and a wonderful opportunity for positive role-modelling is lost;

- Encourages children to recognise and challenge bias themselves (including stereotyping). Children are taught to recognise when individuals or groups are being treated unfairly, and are taught the words and skills they need to take action against unfair treatment;
- Involves parents and other family and community members. Goals and programs are discussed, ways of 'doing things' are shared and adults learn from each other.

Conclusion

All Australians are hurt by bias. Bias in any form, whether it be racism, sexism, handicappism, ageism or homophobia, is a major threat to minorities, to democracy, to human rights, and to public order and harmony.

Demographers tell us that by the turn of the century, Australia will be an even more racially, ethnically and culturally diverse society than it is now. If we are to become a strong, democratic and harmonious nation in which all citizens are treated fairly, we must educate our young children to accept and appreciate human diversity, to recognise bias, and to take action in the face of bias and discrimination.

Research clearly demonstrates that children are aware of difference at an early age, and that difference can be viewed either positively or negatively. The positive or negative orientation depends on what messages children receive through the process of socialisation.

Early childhood practitioners are in an excellent position to positively influence attitudes, to challenge bias, and to prepare all children for a rich, full and productive life. As this chapter suggests, an effective strategy for achieving this, is the implementation of an anti-bias curriculum.

For further thought and discussion

1. Do you remember asking questions about human differences when you were young? What did you ask about? What responses did you get?
2. How did you get information about individuals and groups different from yourself? For example, if you are a non-Aboriginal Australian, how did you learn about Aboriginal Australians? Did any of your learning come through intergroup contact?
3. Have you heard young children ask questions or make comments about race, gender, age or physical ability? What did they say? How would you respond now?

4. What messages about
    - age
    - race, and
    - physical ability

    do you think young children are getting from television?
5. What activities could you provide for three to four year-olds to encourage them to explore racial diversity? What about for five to six year-olds?

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CHAPTER
2

Creating an Anti-Bias Environment

ROSEMARY GREEN

As significant influences in the lives of young children, educators have a responsibility to adopt anti-bias teaching approaches through which they positively affect the attitudes of young children. Practitioners can guide the development of positive attitudes towards differences by creating environments in which young children can see and explore differences; environments in which children can ask questions about gender, race and ethnicity, and physical abilities. They can create environments that embrace diversity and which deliberately challenge the prevailing biased messages of Australian society.

Creating an environment that acknowledges and values diversity is one of the first steps in implementing an anti-bias curriculum. The challenge is to provide rich and accurate information about gender, race, culture, physical and family differences, predominantly through:

- An appropriate visual and aesthetic environment in which stereotypic and inaccurate materials are eliminated;
- Resources and content (such as non-traditional celebrations) which reflect diversity and which are integrated into the daily curriculum; and
- Child–educator interactions.

Influenced by the writing of Derman-Sparks and the Anti-Bias Curriculum (ABC) Task Force (1989), Ramsey (1987) and York (1991), one teacher set out to empower the children with whom she worked in a vertically grouped classroom, by implementing an anti-bias curriculum. This chapter includes excerpts from the teacher's journal and describes some of the strategies she used to create an anti-bias environment in two different settings — one, a centre for preschoolers, aged three years and nine months to five years, and the other a junior primary classroom with children aged five to eight years.

Creating an appropriate visual and aesthetic environment

Environments say a great deal to children, parents, staff and the community, communicating a classroom or centre's philosophy about what educators believe about children and learning. Creating a diverse environment is an exciting and challenging first step in developing an anti-bias curriculum. However, it goes beyond adding a few dolls and posters to the centre or classroom. It involves eliminating stereotypic materials and resources, selecting anti-bias materials, using old materials in creative ways, and creating visual displays which include images of all the children and their families and which accurately and fairly reflect diversity.

Anatomically correct dolls which reflect diverse racial and ethnic identities can make a difference in a classroom. Dolls with similar bodies and a variety of physical features such as different skin colours, eye shapes, hair and gender anatomy, help children to gain familiarity and ease with diversity.

Anatomically correct dolls which reflect diverse racial and ethnic identities can help children gain familiarity and ease with diversity

In the classroom which included children in their first three years of schooling, six new dolls — two with Asian features, two black and two white — were introduced. The dolls raised some interesting discussions, and the children verbalised some theories of their own about colour and gender. Dominic, aged five, said that 'all babies are born white — even brown babies'. Jay, aged six, assumed that a particular doll came from China 'because it's got black eyes and hair'. In a preschool setting, the teacher introduced similar dolls to the centre. The following incidents were observed and recorded in the two settings.

18 March (preschool) — Laura (4.3), India (4.2), Kay (4.3) and Emily (4.2) are playing with the dolls.

Laura: I'll wash this girl.

Teacher: How do you know it's a girl?

Laura: It's got brown skin.

Kay: No, it's a boy — it's got a penis.

Laura: I didn't know that.

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30 May (classroom) — Elizabeth (5.7) and Lee (6.3) are playing with a doll with almond-shaped eyes, and long straight black hair.

Elizabeth: It's a girl. It's got long hair.

Lee: That doesn't mean it's a girl. Boys can have long hair, too.

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3 June (preschool) — Laura (4.4), Kayla (4.6) and Amy (4.6) are washing the dolls. There are two black dolls, two white dolls and two dolls with distinctive Asian features. The dolls have anatomically correct features.

Amy: It's a boy.

Teacher: How can you tell?

***Amy** (pointing to the doll's penis):* It's got a penis. See, Kayla. It's a boy.

Laura puts a dress on the black doll and tells the teacher, who is standing nearby:

Laura: This is my daughter.

(The teacher has observed that the doll is male.)

Teacher: Is your daughter a boy or girl?

Laura: I didn't look. *(She lifts up the dress on the doll.)* Oh, silly me! I've put a dress on this boy. *(She removes the dress and replaces it with long pants and a shirt.)*

Teacher: Is she still your daughter?

Laura: No *(pauses)* — but what do I call her?

Teacher: When it is a boy and you are the mother, you call it a 'son'.

Laura: I'm taking my son to the park.

The goal here is to help children to develop healthy identities and to provide matter-of-fact, accurate feedback about gender. With accurate information, Laura was able to discuss what makes the dolls boys or girls and to use correct anatomical terms. With the children the teacher explored gender and racial and ethnic constancy, including the origin of skin colour (and the role of melanin in determining skin colour) and physical features. While confusion abounds about the actual naming of skin colour (for example, use of the term 'black people'), as children's cognitive ability grows, so does their understanding. Children as young as five can begin to understand simple scientific explanations of physical differences.

18 June (preschool) — The teacher and a group of four-year-old children are gathered around a big book with a story which suggests that a child is having a birthday. On the front cover is a picture of several children standing around a cake with candles.

Teacher: Who do you think is having the birthday?

Tom: The girl in the front.

Teacher: How do you know the person is a girl?

Tom: She's got long hair.

Teacher: Do only girls have long hair?

(Various children chime in, naming people they know who have long hair.)

Zoe: Tony has a ponytail.

Rebecca: Paul has long hair.

Sarah: I'm a girl because I've got long hair.

Teacher: What if you had your long hair cut? Would you still be a girl? Does that change you?

Sarah: I did have my hair cut once. I'm still a girl.

(Further along in the story is a picture of a child holding a basket.)

Teacher:Whose basket is it?

Angus: It's a girl's basket.

Teacher: How do you know?

Angus: It's a girl's. Boys don't have baskets.

Rebecca: Yes, they can have baskets.

Teacher: Angus, Rebecca is right. Boys and girls can have baskets. Baskets are used in many different ways. Let's think of all the ways we can use baskets.

We find and display pictures of people carrying baskets and add a variety of baskets to the classroom — big square baskets, small flat baskets, baskets with handles, baskets without. The children, both boys and girls, find many uses for the baskets, including carrying blocks, books, dolls, lunches, shopping and guinea pigs.

Children generally have narrow definitions of how people should look and what they can do. They accept that males and females are supposed to do different things. Tom and Angus seem to have formed potentially stereotypic images of women. Adults can help children to find out about the contradictions between what they think and what they know.

22 June (preschool) — Paul (4) and I had a disagreement today. Paul was playing with a construction kit which included tracks and buildings and adjuncts such as cars and trucks. Zoe (4) was playing nearby with two sets of family figures, black and white ('Little Tikes').

***Paul** (shouting):* I can't find a fireman. I WANT a fireman!

(I offer Paul a small black female doll.)

Teacher: Here, Paul. Here is a fire-fighter.

Paul: That's not a fireman. I want a fireman.

Teacher: This doll can be a fire-fighter.

Paul: No, it can't. It's a girl — and it's black.

Teacher: Girls can be fire-fighters. Black people can be fire-fighters. Girls and boys, men and women can be fire-fighters. This one can be a fire-fighter.

Paul: No, it can't. It's a girl.

Zoe: Girls can fight fires, too. I am going to be a fire-fighter.

I tell Zoe I am proud of the way she told Paul that girls can be fire-fighters, too.

Sometimes children will accept first-hand experiences as being the truth. At other times they will continue to believe what they think is the truth based on their own experiences and ideas about gender and societal norms. Despite a rich anti-sexist and anti-racist school environment and curriculum, Paul's ideas are influenced by powerful, socially prevailing beliefs about gender. For Paul and others with similar beliefs, the provision of opportunities for exploring gender roles and behaviours will encourage new ways of thinking and behaving. For Zoe, acknowledging her anti-sexist behaviour reinforces her developing attitudes and supports the development of skills for challenging sexist stereotypes and behaviours.

Over the next few weeks, cross-gender play opportunities are encouraged. The family sets are placed near the construction materials; fire-fighting type props (fire hats, a length of hose, a bucket and child-made fire-fighter badges) are added to the home corner; a large box becomes a fire truck; a poster of male and female fire-fighters is displayed. Contact is made with the local fire station, and on a visit one of the fire-fighters on duty is female.

As a significant adult in the lives of students, the educator's role is vital. Teacher intervention supports Paul and other children to get involved in the activities, to go beyond stereotypic gender roles and to use appropriate non-sexist language.

Books depicting diversity are read again and again in the classroom so that children become familiar with them. Children can be shown how to critique books, how to check books for racism and sexism; and books (and other print media) which depict stereotypic or inaccurate images can be used for making comparisons between fair and unfair images.

Fives, sixes and sevens can be introduced to the word stereotyped and, with practice, will soon become adept at using it in appropriate situations.

> *9 July (classroom)* — On every table in the classroom is an alphabet chart. Alongside each letter is a picture. Yesterday I noticed that the letter 'i' has a stereotypic picture of an American Indian alongside. I asked the children if they thought the picture was fair. Most of the children agreed that it was fair. We then compared this picture with other more accurate pictures. The children discussed what was different. With help, they were able to verbalise why the picture was unfair and why stereotypic pictures are offensive. Together we then worked out what we needed to do with the charts. The children agreed to cover the picture with an accurate picture and proceeded to do so.
>
> A search at a later date revealed seven other similar examples in children's dictionaries, wall charts, phonics chart and alphabet books.

The children in Years Reception, 1 and 2 in this class were encouraged to think critically about stereotyping and its implications. Encouraged by the teacher, who also provided experiences that challenged the children's thinking, they soon became adept at locating and discussing objects, language and sources which reflect and teach stereotyping. These included cartoons, a popular television show which had a jokes segment, television commercials, clothing, sayings, posters, graffiti and books. In many instances

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the children worked together to take action against the situations which they deemed unfair, and their previous experiences in anti-bias interactions with each other provided a firm foundation for group activism activities.

Together the children in the vertically grouped class of five, six and seven year-olds worked on activities to bring about change. A letter to a local television station prompted the removal of an offensive advertisement; a bus company responded to the class request to remove racist graffiti from a bus tunnel; and together the class painted over a wall in the school grounds which contained sexist and racist slurs. The activities addressed issues which were important to the children, and they understood what was involved. Families, too, became involved: on returning to school after one weekend, the class discovered that the family of one student who lives opposite the school had taken action to remove some offensive weekend graffiti they had discovered.

Celebrations

In this teacher's classroom, celebrations play an important role. They revolve around not traditional holidays (such as Christmas and Easter), which consume much time, energy and resources, but occasions such as those suggested by Neugebauer (1990):

- *Milestones in children's lives* — losing a tooth, learning to tie shoelaces, to skip or to write one's own name, transition to school.
- *Growth in learning* — the days of the week, reading a book, counting by five, finding out about recycling, snails, worms and the monarch caterpillar, the coming of spring.
- *Children and families* — the birth of a new baby, the arrival of a grandparent, moving house, a new family pet.
- *World events* — the breaking of a drought, a thunderstorm, the Olympic Games.

The commercialism and sensationalism of traditional holidays is avoided, and holidays do not become the focus of the curriculum. The huge amount of time that is traditionally devoted to holidays which are often difficult to celebrate in inclusive and developmentally appropriate ways, is avoided. In our community, some families object to all holiday celebrations. For others, celebrations such as Christmas and Chinese New Year are celebrated in many different ways and are based on abstract concepts which are very difficult for young children to understand.

Child–educator interactions

A diverse visual and aesthetic environment forms the basis for teaching children about gender, racial and ability biases, both deliberately and unintentionally. The ways in which educators interact with children is also crucial in developing an anti-bias approach.

Opportunities for expanding or clarifying children's thinking, and confronting discriminatory behaviours, often happen when we least expect them, such as when a child brings a stereotyped book to school and asks you to read it to the class; or when a child calls another a racist name as you are about to leave to go on playground duty. These incidents, like the one with Paul who wanted a 'fireman', all provide what York (1991) refers to as 'teachable moments'. Play provides opportunities for many 'teachable moments' — unplanned, spontaneous events — and, as such, they can be very powerful teaching tools. Opportunities need to be provided for children to play out their concerns and ideas. When Laura, Amy and Kayla were washing the dolls, they were involved in a life situation. Spontaneous intervention by, and conversation with, the teacher helped the children to clarify their thoughts on gender. By closely observing children, we can become aware of their needs. Then we can help them to learn to think critically and thus resist the effects of stereotyping.

15 May (preschool) — Larry (4.11) and the teacher are working together. A small group of children bring a 'cake' made from play dough with a knife and fork for the teacher. The teacher asks the children, 'Who uses a knife and fork at home?' She then asks them if there are other things with which people can eat.

Li (4.11, Cambodian-Australian) says he uses his fingers; Larry (Chinese-Australian) says he uses chopsticks. The teacher tells the children that families most often use the utensils that their parents and grandparents use. She also tells the children that in some cultures, 'most people' use chopsticks or fingers. The teacher picks up and uses the chopsticks on the play dough table to lift the play dough. She asks Larry if he can show the children how to use them, too. The children watch with interest and begin to experiment. The teacher asks if the children find it easy or hard to eat with chopsticks. The need to practise to become confident in using chopsticks, fingers, and knife and fork is emphasised. The teacher suggests that the children carry out some research to find out more about the diverse ways in which people eat.

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How educators react to children's ideas and behaviours will influence the feelings that children develop. Teachers can play an important role in helping to free children from stereotypic definitions of gender by creating an environment that deliberately contrasts the prevailing biased messages of our society. Children who are provided with accurate images and props, and who are encouraged to think and talk about differences, will be more prepared to deal with biases. Those who are helped to identify and to think critically about what they see in books, on TV, in movies, and on signs and posters are more likely to develop healthy identities and understanding of others.

12 August (classroom) — Today the children were working in small groups to explore similarities and differences. Each group was asked to look carefully at all the people in the classroom and to name and record all the ways we are like one another.

Robert (6) and Lee and Lisa (both 6.7) are talking together.

Lisa: We're all the same.

Robert: That's nonsense. We're not. Some people are better at some things than others. Some are better at running. Some are better at drawing.

Lisa: Well, what if you thought you were really excellent at drawing and someone came along and said that your drawing was yucky?

Lee: You are both talking about different things. Lisa is talking about the strong things. Robert is talking about different things.

Teacher: That's an interesting idea. What things do you mean?

Lee: Well . . .

Lisa: No-one is better than anyone else. We are all part of the human race.

Providing opportunities for cooperative learning experiences and group problem-solving helps children to become aware of diversity and unfair situations. When teacher and children engage in dialogue, the children's thinking is expanded. Together they can explore ideas and learn from each other. The teacher can also play a role in assisting children to take action against unfair situations and to work out ways to take action to bring about change.

> *If the teacher does not create a material and emotional environment that clearly communicates that diversity is important, valued and safe in the classroom, then children will not raise issues. (Derman-Sparks, 1992, p. 127)*

Some children have very narrow definitions of what men and women can, and are supposed to do. Remember Paul, who wanted a 'fireman' doll? Socially prevailing attitudes are very powerful, and Paul is still clinging to his own ideas about gender behaviour despite a rich anti-sexist curriculum. As a teacher, it would be easy to become discouraged.

In the following excerpt, the teacher intervenes to provide Paul with another way of thinking.

> *1 September (preschool)* — Paul (4.2.) is playing outside in the sandpit. Across the road from the school, a woman is cutting the grass in her front garden with a lawn mower.
>
> ***Paul:*** Why is that lady mowing the lawn? Where is her man?
>
> ***Teacher:*** The woman can mow the lawn. She probably likes to mow the lawn. She is doing a good job mowing the lawn. She doesn't need a man to mow the lawn. Both men and women can mow the lawn.
>
> ***Paul:*** Why can't she ring a worker up?
>
> ***Teacher:*** The woman is a worker and she is working at mowing the lawn.
>
> ***Paul:*** Well, I don't want her to. I want her to get a man to do it. We don't need to get 'your local Jim' *(a TV advertisement)*. My dad has a lawn mower.
>
> ***Teacher:*** Who can mow a lawn?
>
> ***Paul:*** Men . . . *(pauses)* and women.

It is difficult for Paul with his limited experience, and an understanding of gender behaviour that is rigid and traditional (based on his own experiences within his own family who agree with and act according to prevailing social norms), to change his ideas about gender behaviour. When children grow up in a biased environment, they come to believe that there is only one right way of living in the world. For Paul, correct information and role models will enable him to expand his thinking and his ideas about gender roles.

Young children are naturally curious about the world and are interested in differences. It is essential that they receive honest, simple answers to their questions. Without this support, their thinking is likely to remain distorted and they will continue to be susceptible to believing in stereotypes. Situations such as the one described above have enormous potential for helping children to redefine themselves and their place in the world.

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Predispositions acquired at early developmental levels may form the irrational but potent foundation for racism and sexism (Katz, 1984). When planning and implementing curricula, teachers take into account goals relating to the acquisition of knowledge, understanding, skills and processes. The development of positive attitudes and dispositions, or inclinations to learning, is crucial in the early years.

Fostering anti-bias attitudes towards disabilities and empowering children with disabilities

The following story describes how ensuring the individual appropriateness of a program for one child with a specific disability has the potential to enhance learning experiences for all children.

George was seven years old and the second child in a family which had migrated from Malta. George was in his third year at school and this was the first year in the vertically grouped class. For George, who is visually impaired, schooling was a struggle. Throughout the year, I was challenged to provide for George an inclusive learning environment in which he could be successful. Fostering anti-bias attitudes towards disability, and empowering George, required much more than just being in a classroom. George needed to be accepted. He also needed an environment that fostered his autonomy and development of alternative modes of interaction with the world.

Children need information, words and support in order to handle questions about disabilities. The teacher discussed with George what he wished the other children to know about his disability. So that the children could gain accurate information about George's disability, simple, brief and accurate answers were provided to their questions. When one of the children asked why George had big print books to read and different paper, the teacher responded, 'George has a visual impairment — he is not able to see as well as you. He likes to read and write like you do, so we have worked out ways to make it easier for him to read and write. He must wear his glasses for all activities. He has thick pencils, and paper with thick black lines on which to write. Books with large print make it easier for him to read and find the words he needs for writing.'

George was also taught that he had the right to choose whether or not to answer others' questions by saying that he did not want to answer or to ask the teacher.

To counter misconceptions and stereotyping, the class brainstormed a list of things that vision-impaired people can/cannot do.

Other strategies and resources for George included opportunities for writing on the computer, a tilted board to raise the writing paper and thus alleviate neck strain, new glasses, a cloth kept in the classroom for cleaning his glasses, extra support for reading and writing, and the use of a language experience approach for motivating George to write.

In mathematics lessons, George was able to choose from a range of resources which included large pieces of equipment rather than, for example, the small MAB unit blocks, small counters or a regular stop-watch. In physical education lessons and games, George had access to large balls and small red balls. (He had told the teacher he could readily identify a small red ball, but not a yellow one.)

At the beginning of the year, the teacher negotiated with the children about the layout of the classroom. It was important that the same spatial organisation be maintained throughout the year to allow George access. The tables remained in the same places, and George had a permanent place at which he could work with his book-tray alongside his table. The children worked out other strategies, too, for ease of movement. When sitting on the floor the children sat in a circle rather than in a group, not touching but leaving small spaces between each child. This made it easier for George to move in and out of the circle. The children always created a space near the teacher and close to the board for George.

Throughout the year, support was provided for George to develop autonomy and independence. Achieving these goals is difficult for any child, let alone children like George, with big hurdles to jump! George's mother had, in her own words, 'been over-protective', and George had developed learned helplessness. It was frequently necessary to encourage him to 'have-a-go' and to allow the other children to help him only after he had 'had-a-go'. Teachers and peers praised George for any independence. Opportunities for collaborative learning provided support for George and all the children. In small groups, the children took turns with roles, shared responsibilities for learning, and learned from each other.

George was accepted and respected in the classroom. This did not just happen. During the year, opportunities were provided for seeing shared abilities and similarities. The children were taught strategies for, and given opportunities for practice in, dealing with discriminatory exclusion behaviours. These enabled George to become more assertive.

Through stories, role-play and hands-on activities, the children learned about a range of disabilities. These included: activities with a 'feelie box'; use of magnifying glasses; activities which included blindfolds; signing some basic often used words and singing songs with signing; and games in which the children sought information from each other without talking.

The children were presented with a range of problem-solving situations, based on personal experiences, or stories — invented or from books. They were challenged to find out how to make the classroom accessible for a wheelchair; what to do if a friend who is hearing impaired does not hear the fire drill bell; what activities you could do if you could not see and what else you could use; and how to make it possible for a visually impaired classmate to play T-ball.

Other opportunities were also provided for the class to learn about environmental adaptations to promote accessibility, such as the Braille alphabet, captioned TV programs, and seeing eye dogs; and to find accessible and inaccessible places in the school. When the children discovered that signposting around the school was difficult to read, they successfully campaigned to increase the size of writing on the signs.

Adopting an anti-bias approach enabled George to:

- Develop confidence, autonomy, independence and competence; and
- Develop strategies for handling and challenging name-calling, stereotypic attitudes and physical barriers.

Such an approach also enabled all children in the class to:

- Gain information, ask questions and express feelings about disabilities;
- Develop skills for interacting knowledgeably, comfortably and fairly with people who have various disabilities;
- Develop understanding that a person with a disability is different in one respect but similar in many others; and
- Resist and challenge stereotyping, name-calling and physical barriers directed at people with disabilities (Derman-Sparks & the ABC Task Force, 1989, p. 40).

For George, curricular strategies such as routines, children's interactions and activities needed to be intentionally structured. This required an understanding of George's needs in various environments, the influence of the particular environment on his behaviour, his preferred style of learning, and factors that motivated his learning. A multidisciplinary, collaborative approach which involved his family, all school staff and specialist personnel with competencies related to identifying and addressing his needs, goals and priorities, was crucial in ensuring that George's needs were met.

All children with special needs are a diverse group who share needs with all other children, but also have unique needs. George's story highlights the need for providing an anti-bias curriculum to provide the best possible education for children with special needs.

Conclusion

An early childhood environment conveys strong messages and attitudes about what is important and valued. An anti-bias environment reflects a diverse range of images in the lifestyles of families, in gender roles, in racial and cultural backgrounds, and in capabilities. Through omission, it also suggests what is unimportant and not valued. Schools and centres can create anti-bias environments which encourage children to explore diversity and deliberately challenge bias. By listening to and talking with children, and by providing a curriculum which is based on, and comes from, the daily lives and experiences of children, teachers can teach children skills in problem-solving and critical thinking, and encourage them to stand up for what they believe is right and fair.

The provision alone of anti-bias materials in programs will not change attitudes. The goals, structure and characteristics of the curriculum itself must change.

In examining our own attitudes towards diversity and bias, and changing them, we will be better prepared to positively influence children's attitudinal development.

Teachers who adopt an anti-bias approach can make a difference.

For further thought and discussion

1. What do you need to think of when a five-year-old Aboriginal child begins school? What items in the classroom reaffirm the child's Aboriginality and encourage her/him to think, 'This is where I belong'? Is there a picture, a poster, a book, a variety of shades of brown felt-tipped pens and crayons? Are there brown-skinned dolls in the home corner?
2. What five things could you do to eliminate stereotypes from your setting?
3. What role do celebrations play in your setting? What changes could you make?
4. How can you find out about what families teach their children about their gender and racial identities?
5. Group activism activities can be empowering experiences. How can children and adults in your setting work together to create change?

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CHAPTER 3

Cultural Diversity

MARY VAJDA

Australia is often described as one of the most multicultural countries in the world. It is diverse in culture, ethnicity and home languages spoken by its people. It is a kaleidoscope of colour, customs and languages.

Initially, Australia was considered to be a melting pot of the different ethnic and racial groups that came to start a new life. New migrants were expected to assimilate into the dominant Australian culture. They were expected to speak, behave, and have the same beliefs and values as the rest of the non-Aboriginal population. A history of migration has taught Australians that attempts to enforce conformity do not work. As the discussion paper, *Towards a National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* (1988, p. 2) states, a policy to

> *[a]ssimilate newcomers . . . holds high costs for the individual and for society. It denies people their identity and self-esteem. It drives wedges between children and their parents . . . It turns communities inwards and perpetuates ethnic separatism. It risks the creation of second-class status for those who do not — or cannot — conform to the stereotype of an 'Australian Australian'.*

In the last two decades, however, government policy towards newly arrived migrants has changed. From a policy of assimilation, Australia moved to a policy of integration and finally to a policy of multiculturalism or, as some people prefer to call it, *cultural pluralism*. People's diverse cultural heritage and background are now more readily recognised and acknowledged rather than suppressed.

Since arriving in Australia as a displaced person in 1950, I have personally experienced the changes in the community's attitude and government policy to 'new Australians' (as we were labelled in those days). I remember travelling on a bus with my mother when I was about five years of age. My mother and I were having a conversation. We were speaking in Hungarian. A woman in the seat in front of us turned around and in no uncertain terms admonished us to speak in English, as we were now in Australia. When I started school, my parents introduced me to the teacher as Maria. The teacher turned to my parents and said that from now on I will be called Mary.

Speaking a language other than English in public is now more socially accepted. With our knowledge of language development, early childhood staff encourage the use of a child's home language rather than deny it. It amuses me today when I hear of parents from non-European backgrounds naming their child Maria or Marika. These are the very names I was not permitted to use in the Anglo-Celtic Australia of the 1950s.

I brought my children up to be bilingual. When Kathryn started school she spoke very little English, though she could understand more than she could speak. As far as I am aware, it did not harm her. Today she is a successful speech pathologist.

The school my children attended in the 1970s had a 'tourist' approach to multicultural education. This was in response to a change in government policy and attitudes towards migrants. At the time, I was relieved that my children's experience of being bicultural was so much more positive than mine had been. We were proud to share our home language, foods, costumes and dance with the other children in the school at certain special times of the year.

A 'tourist' approach to a multicultural curriculum is better than denying the ethnic and racial multicultural nature of Australian society, but it can itself be limiting and even destructive. It forgets that children are influenced by their culture, race, ethnicity and family every day of their lives, not just on one special day of the year. A tourist approach is more likely to encourage stereotypes than to dispel them.

The change in government policy from assimilation to cultural pluralism presents many challenges to practitioners working in the children's services field. Early childhood staff can no longer afford to be ethnocentric in their practices.

Education and training and the Federal Government's Quality Improvement and Accreditation System for long day child care centres have challenged early childhood professionals to deliver quality programs. A quality program emphasises the importance of families in the partnership of care and education of all children. This, however, is no easy task, as families are very diverse. They are characterised by attitudes, values, languages, customs and beliefs that may be unfamiliar to the early childhood practitioner. Merely espousing a developmentally appropriate program is insufficient. To be effective practitioners, early childhood staff need to be inter-culturally sensitive. That is, they need to be sensitive to the needs of children and families from a wide range of cultural and ethnic groups, as well as provide developmentally appropriate programs. They need to know about the culture of the children with whom they are working, and they need to acknowledge and confront their own biases and prejudices. An anti-bias curriculum is a way of achieving this, as it celebrates each individual's diversity. It is a way of challenging monocultural approaches by incorporating diverse cultural programs into the workplace.

To fully appreciate the value of an anti-bias curriculum, we as early childhood practitioners need to be aware of the composition of Australian society. We need to have a basic understanding of the nature of culture, the characteristics of minority groups, and the detrimental effects of prejudice.

Australian society

An ethnic perspective

The Australian population is a little under 18 million people. One in five Australians were born overseas, with one in eight born in a country where the main language spoken is not English. Two in five Australians have both parents born overseas; of these, one in five come from non-English speaking countries or have non-English speaking parents (Callan, 1986, p. 65; Guerra, 1990; Jamrozik & Boland, 1989).

Australian society comprises people representing 140 different ethnic backgrounds. They speak approximately 100 different imported languages and approximately 50 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. Australians identify themselves with more than 80 religions (Callan, 1986, p. 65; Lo Bianco, 1987, cited in Makin et al., 1995, p. xviii).

In some areas of Australia there is a moderate level of ethnic concentration, such as Asian people in Sydney's Cabramatta, Germans in the Barossa Valley, Greeks in Melbourne, and Italians in North Perth, to mention a few. These ethnic concentrations are, however, nowhere on the scale of ethnic concentrations that have developed in the United States. In Australia, no one ethnic group monopolises whole rural or metropolitan areas; rather, people from diverse backgrounds share community facilities (Price, 1989).

To fully understand the multicultural nature of Australian society, it is necessary to look at the history of migration. How did Australia become such a multicultural nation?

Historical perspective

The original migrants to Australia were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They were the first known cultural group to take up residence in Australia. It is thought that they emigrated from South East Asia at least 40 000 years ago. Horton (1994, p. 397) suggests that Aboriginal people may have even been in Australia for more than 50 000 years.

Prior to European colonisation, 100 per cent of the population was made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Australian indigenous people were hunter gatherers who spread throughout the continent and developed rich cultural traditions. It is estimated that the population was between 300 000 and one million persons before white colonisation. It is also estimated that some 600 different groups existed and more than 200 distinct and mutually unintelligible Aboriginal languages were spoken in Australia (Castles, 1991).

With European colonisation, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population went into serious decline. This was caused by the impact of new diseases brought into the country, as well as the killings, brutal treatment, dispossession, social and cultural disruption, and disintegration inflicted by the settlers. By around 1920, it is estimated that the indigenous population had been reduced to approximately 60 000 people (Castles, 1994, p. 412).

The second wave of migration was European colonisation in 1788. The first Europeans to arrive in Australia were, in the majority, convicts from the British Isles. Transportation of convicts was the major immigration policy for the first 40 years of the colony's history. By 1830 there was less reliance on convict transportation, with some colonial governments totally stopping transportation. A policy of attracting free settlers was developed. The colonial governments offered assisted passage and free land grants to people from the British Isles who wished to emigrate to Australia. The practice of providing assisted passage to British migrants continued to varying degrees up until the 1970s (Castles, 1991).

The 1850s and 1860s brought a large number of people from a range of different cultural backgrounds (including approximately 400 000 Chinese people) to Australia. However, most of these people emigrated from Australia at the end of the gold rush era. As a result of the post-gold rush exodus, during the 19th century, at least 75 per cent of the Australian overseas-born population was from the British Isles (Castles, 1991).

The third wave of migration occurred shortly after the Second World War, which had highlighted Australia's susceptibility to foreign invasion. In the post-war years, it was felt that Australia needed to significantly increase the population in order to provide defence as well as to ensure rapid development and reconstruction of the economy. In response, the Australian government vigorously recruited migrants from war-torn Europe. Between 1947 and 1961, there were increases from all the 58 birthplaces identified by the census of the time (Castles, 1991).

Guerra (1990) claims that the Australian government did not aim initially to create an ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse society. The original aim was to increase migration from Britain; however, this strategy was unsuccessful, as a smaller number of migrants were attracted than anticipated. With a short fall of British migrants, agents had to go further afield and recruit displaced persons from Europe's refugee camps. Initially, people were recruited from Northern, Eastern and Central Europe. These migrants were chosen because they had 'blue eyes and blonde hair' and looked like other Australians. It was felt that if their physical features were similar to the rest of the population, then the migrants would not be as noticeable and they would assimilate. The Australian population was told that the new migrants would be like them in all ways. Only later were the darker skinned and darker haired people of Southern Europe accepted.

One of the first major pieces of legislation passed by the new Commonwealth Government in 1901 was the *Immigration Restriction Act*.

This Act ensured that Australia only accepted into the country people considered to be desirable. It prohibited people who failed to pass a dictation test. The dictation test was not compulsory, but it was administered by an immigration officer as if it were required. It was a written test administered in any European language. Its length was a minimum of 50 words. In effect, the legislation provided a restrictive entry policy towards people who were of non-European descent. The Act became popularly known as the 'White Australia Policy'. The alleged aim of the government was to restrict migrant entry, as far as possible, to people who would be most likely to adjust and who would be more accepted by the Australian people.

From 1966 the White Australia Policy was relaxed, and people who possessed qualifications that were recognised and in demand, and who met normal migration requirements, were granted entry. Small numbers of (mainly Christian) Asian migrants started arriving in Australia. Finally, in 1973, the Commonwealth Government adopted a policy of non-discrimination on the grounds of race, colour or nationality in the selection of migrants, (Australian Population and Immigration Council, 1977, pp. 23–28).

With the repealing of the discriminatory legislation and the formulation of a government policy on the intake of refugees, the 1970s saw a fourth wave of migration and a change in the race and ethnic composition of people accepted into Australia. In the early 1970s, people arrived from India, Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), Malaysia, South America and the Middle East. Between 1976 and 1986, the number of Australian residents who were born in South East Asia rose by more than 300 per cent, and there was also strong continued immigration from Malaysia and the Philippines. The largest single immigrant group, however, to arrive in Australia in the late 1970s and early 1980s were people born in New Zealand. Other non-Asian people to arrive during that period were groups from South Africa, Poland and the United States (Castles, 1991).

The original aim was to keep the Australian culture as homogeneous as possible, with people of Anglo-Celtic ancestry in the majority. World events and internal pressures, however, changed the nature and composition of Australian society forever, bringing with it new challenges.

The nature of culture

This chapter has so far discussed the multicultural nature of Australian society from an ethnic perspective. Culture is more diverse. All societies are influenced by and preserve culture in some form.

Lippman (1977, p. 2) defines a cultural group as a group of individuals who speak a mutually understandable dialect. She suggests that it can refer to divisions by class, race, nationality or ethnicity. It can be argued that culture has many more facets than Lippman suggested. The Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs (1988, p. 20) defines culture as a pattern of values, beliefs and forms of interaction used by individuals as a basis for responding to situations. The way in which individuals respond to each other is determined by what Lippman calls people's 'subjective culture'. This is the person's unique way of perceiving their social environment. Individuals' personal experiences are filtered through a subjective lens.

Fairchild (1970, cited in Locke, 1992, p. 3) has a broader definition of culture. He defines culture as all behaviour patterns that are socially acquired and socially transmitted. These behaviours, he feels, may be explicitly and/or implicitly transmitted by the symbols of the human group. These include customs, beliefs, institutions, material objects, artefacts and technical knowledge. Culture is preserved by the transmission of traditional ideas and values. This primarily occurs by way of language, as language enables people to learn, experience and share their traditions and customs within the group and with people of other cultural backgrounds.

Culture gives individuals self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as providing them with a sense of belonging to a supportive network of like-minded people. Locke (1992, p. xiii) suggests:

> *All individuals are, in some respects, like other individuals, as a result of cultural group membership. The cultural group serves as a basis for individuals to become humanised. Each individual becomes fully human through the process of participating in a cultural group or groups.*

People tend to feel most comfortable within their own culture. This is why people from the same culture tend to gravitate towards each other in new or unfamiliar situations; why in some areas there is a concentration of people from the same ethnic background; why many gay and lesbian people prefer night clubs and holiday accommodation which cater solely for them. People prefer the company of others who share their culture. When people feel accepted and secure in their own culture, they are then able to extend loyalty and commitment to other networks and to the wider society that accepts their individuality. If they are made to feel inadequate or unaccepted, cultural conflict can occur. When there is cultural harmony, both groups can benefit intellectually, socially and economically, which in turn leads to new ideas and perspectives (The Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs, 1988, p. 20).

Culture is not a static tradition. It changes with external stimuli and continues with social interaction. People do not realise how greatly culture influences their behaviour until they come across other ways of doing similar things. With the acceptance of the many different and varied ethnic groups into Australia, the very fabric of Australian culture has changed over the years. When immigrants come to Australia, they are influenced by the existing environmental conditions of the host country. The new residents bring with them their own child-rearing practices, religious practices, family structure, language and the arts, as well as their values and attitudes. They also come with their own psychological and behavioural qualities (Locke, 1992, p. 5).

Two differing cultures can work together or against each other; when they work together, a new cultural identity emerges. Not only does the dominant culture change, but also the minority cultures change. As Edgar (1980, p. 131) suggests, 'culture is a product of conflict between competing symbols, controlling ideas and competing definitions of reality'. When two or more cultures come into intimate contact with each other, they take on and adapt beliefs and practices that they consider to be of benefit to themselves. For example, our family celebrates Christmas on Christmas Eve, as do Hungarians in Hungary. We have found this to be a beneficial tradition for a number of reasons. The children love it, as they get their Christmas presents a day earlier than their friends; and it suits the adults, as a number of our family members have married Australian partners. Celebrating Christmas over two days gives everyone the opportunity to spend quality time with their respective families. It also causes less stress on everyone's stomach. For our Christmas meal we have chosen to remain with the traditional Hungarian Christmas cake, but our main meal is the traditional Australian Christmas meal with roast turkey, ham and trimmings.

This is how our family celebrates Christmas, but it cannot be said that all Hungarians living in Australia have the same tradition. Whenever we come in contact with people representing a cultural group different from our own, it has to be remembered that they are all individuals and should not be stereotyped. There are many differences within cultural groups. Often, differences between members of the same cultural group may be greater than differences between the dominant culture and other cultural groups. A number of factors contribute to these differences, such as socioeconomic level, education level and occupation. For example, my Australian friend and I have more in common with each other than I have with a number of other Hungarian acquaintances. Maggie and I enjoy going to the opera, ballet, theatre and art gallery, and having coffee together. Some of my Hungarian acquaintances could not think of anything more boring or wasteful of time and money. I, in turn, find it very difficult to communicate with these people on other than a shallow, polite level and have very little in common with them.

It is dangerous to stereotype people. When working in the children's services field, one needs to keep an open mind and consider each person's uniqueness, as well as keeping in mind the nature of the person's cultural background.

Minority groups

This chapter has included discussion of ethnic and racial minority groups. In Australian society, there are a number of other forms of minority groups. Ethnic and racial minorities are only one form of minority group that exists. In an anti-bias curriculum, all forms of difference need to be acknowledged. The next section of the chapter will discuss minority groups in general and then discuss the detrimental effect which prejudice can have on people.

Callan (1986, p. 1) defines minority groups as groups of people who are discriminated against because of physical, cultural or behavioural attributes. The group members themselves acknowledge that they are objects of discrimination. Edgar (1980, p. 279) suggests that the term refers to a 'social condition, a set of dominance relations rather than to the numerical size of the social group'.

.The main characteristic of a minority group, and what differentiates them from the dominant group, is the unequal distribution of power, prestige and privilege. The dominant group may be numerically less than the minority group, as evidenced in pre Nelson Mandela days in South Africa, but the dominant group holds all the power, privilege and status.

Callan (1986, p. 3) identifies three different forms of minority groups. These he classifies as physical minorities, cognitive minorities and behavioural minorities. There also exists a fourth form, social minorities.

People represented by these minority groups are devalued by society in general. They are usually devalued by people who embody the opposite traits. For instance, it is usually the rich who devalue and exploit the poor; it is usually the able-bodied person who abuses the person who has a disability; it is usually men who abuse women, and so forth. As staff in the children's services field, we will encounter people who represent all or some of the following minority groups. We may encounter these people as clients, co-workers or even as superiors. As professionals, it is our role to demonstrate social justice and equity to all.

Devalued people can be representatives of one or more of the following four minority groups:

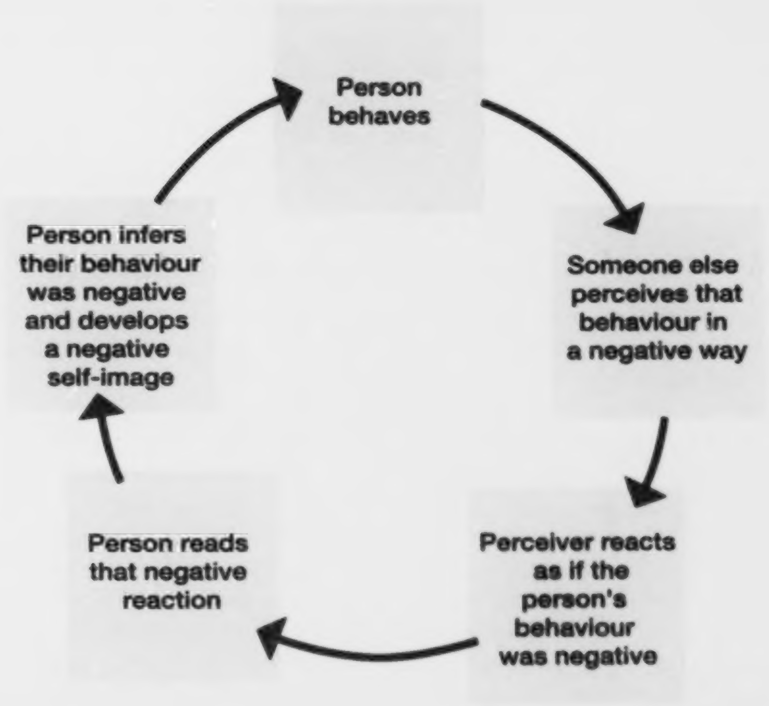
1. **Physical minorities** include people who differ from the dominant group because of their physical appearance, for example:
    - Minorities by race and ethnicity, especially if from non-Caucasian backgrounds;
    - People with disabilities, such as people with impaired vision or hearing; or people impaired in their bodies, such as those with cerebral palsy, epilepsy or paralysis; or people impaired in their thinking or behaviour, such as the mentally handicapped or mentally disordered;

- The elderly and the unborn. People at either ends of the age spectrum are often devalued, especially if either group is in some way impaired, unwanted or inconvenient;
- Women. Patriarchy in Western societies has traditionally devalued the contribution of women, who were seen as being the property of their husbands.

2. **Cognitive minorities** include people who are at most variance because of their personal beliefs. This would include people who are perceived to have nonconformist religious or political views, particularly if they also take a stance against the political systems and values of the dominant culture. Nelson Mandela is an example of a person who took a firm stand against the political and value system of the dominant culture; because of his rejection of the apartheid policy in South Africa, he was gaoled for 20 years. People who rebel against the social order are also included in this category. History has shown that groups such as Jews, Quakers, Irish Catholics, Seventh Day Adventists, members of various religious sects or the Communist Party, and political dissidents have at some time been discriminated against.
3. **Behavioural minorities** include people who are unorthodox in their conduct or behaviour, such as:
    - Homosexual people and transvestites. Gay and lesbian families are included in this category;
    - People who are self-destructive, such as alcoholics, drug addicts and potential suicides; and
    - People who are hyperactive, or lethargic and lazy.
4. **Social minorities** comprise dispossessed people, such as the homeless, refugees and illegal immigrants, especially if they are also members of a devalued ethnic group. Other representatives are the unemployed, people on low incomes, single parents, prisoners, and people who have few skills or whose skills are not considered to be useful to a particular society.

The social implication for members of minority groups is that members experience a sense of loss of identity. This occurs because the group's own rules, values and norms are not seen to be worthwhile by the dominant group and therefore not worth preserving. Individuals gradually start to lose their self-esteem and, with it, their dignity.

Members of minority groups can develop strong feelings of hopelessness. If members of a group have been told for generations that they are useless, they start believing it and it starts becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.


Person behaves
Someone else perceives that behaviour in a negative way
Perceiver reacts as if the person's behaviour was negative
Person reads that negative reaction
Person infers their behaviour was negative and develops a negative self-image

This sense of hopelessness may be passed on to future generations. As control is in the hands of the dominant group, they have the power to shape, intensify or solve the problems of the minority group. Examples of this are evident when we consider the way Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been treated by generations of the white Australian population and Australian governments since white colonisation. Sally Morgan's book, My *Place* (1987), provides vivid examples of this powerlessness and the perceived futility of struggling against white government officials, to the point of eventual denial of her family's Aboriginal heritage. (See also Chapter 12 of this book.)

Minority groups also have thrust upon them the pressure to conform. The dominant group either directly or indirectly coerces minority group members to change their values, beliefs and practices. Through real or imagined pressure, minority groups can lose their individual identity and uniqueness. This occurred particularly in the days when assimilation was government policy.

In recent years, however, Australia has embarked on a multicultural policy that espouses that all Australians are free to express and share (within the defined limits of the law) their individual cultural heritage, which includes their language and religion. All Australians have the right to equal treatment and opportunity, and the policy recognises that Australia needs to maintain, develop and utilise effectively the skills and talents of all Australians regardless of their background (Department of the Prime Minister, 1989).

Cultural differences and child care

The Australian Bureau of Statistics figures indicate that 21 per cent of the Australian population is comprised of migrants, but there appears to be an underutilisation of Australian child care services by non-English speaking migrants. Graycar and Jamrozik (1989, p. 212) found that in 1987, only 6 per cent of children from non-English speaking background families were in long day child care centres, while only 3 per cent utilised family day care services and 5 per cent used out of school hours care. On reviewing the 1991 Census of Child Care Services figures, Hutchins (1993) noted some change. She found that 10 per cent of children in subsidised centre-based child care centres were children from non-English speaking backgrounds, 6 per cent were in commercial child care centres, 6 per cent were in family day care, and 6 per cent of children used out of school hours care. While the figures indicate an increase, children from non-English speaking backgrounds are still underrepresented in formal child care services.

Hutchins (1993) highlighted a common Australian community perception that migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds are supported by a vast informal network of extended family. She suggested that this is a myth. The majority of migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds have left their extended families behind them. The reality is that they have little or no family support available to them on arrival in Australia. Social isolation is more frequently experienced by ethnic families than is often realised (Graycar & Jamrozik, 1989, cited in Hutchins, 1993).

Non-English speaking migrant families are thought not to choose formal child care services because they prefer to have their children looked after by the mother. Hutchins (1993) feels that this perception is based on the assumption that the strong motherhood ideology predominant in the non-Aboriginal Australian community is shared by other ethnic groups. It is often assumed that there was no formal child care system in the country of origin and the care of the children was then the sole responsibility of the mother. The reverse is often true.

The lack of formal child care systems actually indicates the success of an informal system. Meyer (1992) reported that young children in many developing countries are cared for by a live-in person or extended family members. In many cases, the expectation is that the mother returns to the paid workforce in order to supplement the family income.

When these families arrive in Australia, they no longer have the support of the extended family nor access to the cheap labour of live-in help. This then puts extra stress on families who need the extra income in order to establish themselves in the new country. If non-English speaking background migrant families are used to utilising non-maternal child care, why do they not make greater utilisation of formal child care services in Australia? There are a number of factors involved in this.

Hutchins (1993) cites studies undertaken by Inglis (1985) and D'Mello and Bugureno (1989) which indicated that lack of appropriate child care keeps migrant women from seeking paid employment. The researchers found that in situations where formal child care was available, women of non-English speaking backgrounds still tended to place their children in informal arrangements with other women from the same ethnic group. The reasons given for this were:

- Parents preferred their children to communicate in their home language.
- Parents felt that there was a lack of understanding of cultural differences among service providers.
- Parents felt that the caregivers' and coordinators' attitudes were unsympathetic.
- Families were not aware of all the services that were available to them.
- The women felt that caregivers didn't understand their cultural child-rearing practices.
- The service opening times were considered to be inflexible.

These findings indicate that children's services professionals need to be more proactive and non-discriminatory in their child care practices. This cannot, however, happen until we understand how and why we act in certain ways.

The nature of prejudice

Prejudice, bias and stereotyping have the effect of devaluing the person. Wolfensberger (1992) argues that, to a degree, we all devalue some groups of people. He suggests that this is all part of being human. It is a universal phenomenon and it happens in all societies throughout history, varying from culture to culture. We all have personal prejudices and biases.

Everything that is perceived through our senses is evaluated in some form. We make personal, subjective judgements about all that we encounter. This can happen on a conscious or unconscious level. Our evaluations may be positive or negative, but in either case they are not value free.

Problems tend to occur when we operate at the unconscious level and are unaware of the occasions when we socially devalue other people. For us to overcome our unconscious behaviour, we need to bring our negative feelings to consciousness so that we can address and adapt them.

Working in the children's services field, we meet people from all walks of life, representing all minority groups. How we react to these people, and the conscious and subconscious messages we give them, are determined by our own prior experiences. Conflict occurs because we find it difficult when we experience difference, and we are often fearful of that difference. If we want children to be accepting of difference, then we need to examine our own beliefs and practices as they influence our behaviour and the way in which we interact with the children and families with whom we come in contact. It is our actions and practices that shape the next generation.

Stereotyping is defined by Ehrlich (1973, pp. 20, 32) as a set of beliefs or disbeliefs that individuals hold about any particular group of people. He believes that the family and the school are the major institutions that pass on knowledge in society, and that by the age of three the family may have passed on stereotypes to the child. It is the family and school (and child care services, as more and more families access them) that present, authenticate and legitimise stereotypes.

Stereotypes tend to emphasise the negative features of a minority group, to which individuals add their own value judgements thereby potentially exaggerating the stereotype. Wolfensberger (1992, pp. 17–19) suggests that when we actually do meet a person from a minority group, we may project the negative stereotype on to them.

We may have so many preconceptions of minority groups that when we actually meet someone representing that particular group, all our preconceptions will override the positive experience and this positive experience will only play a relatively minor role. We would explain away the conflict between the positive experience and our stereotypes, perhaps by deciding the individual was an exception and therefore not like other members of the minority group. Wolfensberger argues that it is relatively rare for us to change our judgement about a minority group or even to be influenced by our actual experience of that group. We would have to have many consistently positive experiences of the minority group to change our stereotype. Wolfensberger, however, believes that it will take only a few confirmations of our expectations and stereotypes for them to be almost irreversibly embedded.

The time to shape and overcome a person's stereotypes and prejudices, Wolfensberger believes, is when the person is still in a 'naive mind set' about the minority group. This is in the early childhood years. It is easier to avoid stereotypes, bias and prejudice before the individual's mind has been exposed to negative social influences. We have a crucial role in the early childhood field in preventing children from developing stereotypes by ensuring that they are exposed to a wide range of differences in a positive way.

If we, as practitioners in the early childhood profession, are serious about valuing each child and each family, then our actions and behaviours must strongly prompt others to perceive potentially devalued persons in a positive way. We must embed into the minds of our children positive things about the group or person perceived. We must provide positive experiences related to differences. We cannot do this if we have not addressed our own feelings about difference.

Early childhood staff will encounter and work with children and families who represent ethnic and racial, cognitive, behavioural and social minorities. Some of these people's beliefs and values will be very different from the staff members'. To work effectively with families from other cultures, it is necessary to understand one's own history, beliefs, values, culture and ethnicity, as they all influence the way we behave and interact with others.

For further thought and discussion

1. Interview the senior members of your family. Where did your family originally come from? How long has your family been in Australia? Why did the family migrate? What were some of their early experiences? What was Australian society like in those days? How accepted did they feel?
2. Discuss with your family any celebrations, rituals and holidays that your family continues to celebrate which are different from the mainstream culture. Why are they celebrated? What is the story behind them?
3. Identify the range of differences that are represented in your local community.
4. Has there been a time when you were a target of stereotyping, discrimination or harassment? What happened? How did you feel about it?
5. List things that you are doing to challenge stereotyping. How effective do you think you are? What can you do to be more effective?

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CHAPTER 4

The Gender Factor

GLENDA MACNAUGHTON

Early childhood staff rely heavily on their ability to interpret the significance of what children are doing. Gathering and interpreting accurate child observations are central in planning curricula that are responsive to the needs, interests and abilities of the children (Arthur et al. 1993; Faragher & MacNaughton 1990; Lambert et al. 1986). The traditional approach to individual developmental observations in curriculum planning generally involves a multifaceted cycle of:

1. Gathering observations of individual children;
2. Organising the information into child development theory categories such as cognitive, physical, emotional and social development;
3. Interpreting the developmental significance of the observations;
4. Planning developmentally appropriate experiences on the basis of these interpretations; and
5. Gathering further observations to evaluate the appropriateness of planned experiences and to assist the next phase of curriculum planning.

How and what staff observe will, however, be biased by, among other things, their cognitive capacities and interests. Staff's cognitive capacities include such things as memory and level of concentration. It is impossible to see everything that every child does. Staff must therefore make decisions about what to observe and what it is important to remember.

Staff's interests in particular components of the early childhood curriculum will also influence what they want to know about children. For instance, some staff have a special interest in the development of children's creativity, while other staff are interested in children's environmental awareness.

The interest addressed in this chapter is the gender factor in children's early development. Despite over 20 years of research detailing the significance of gender in development (see Libby & Aries, 1989; Honig, 1983), many early childhood staff fail to recognise the significance of gender in children's daily lives (MacNaughton, 1992; Walkerdine, 1990; Morgan & Dunn, 1990; Dunn & Morgan, 1987; Browne & France, 1986) and the complex and multiple ways it influences how, when, where and what children learn in, and through, the early childhood curriculum.

Gender appears as a 'factor' in the behaviour of children as young as two or three years of age when they begin to recognise gender differences. By four years of age, children know their gender and what they and others around them normally expect from a person of their gender (Miedzian, 1991; France, 1986; Honig, 1983; Kessler & McKenna, 1982), and the gender factor influences how they think, feel, behave, dress and play. Despite the early age at which children become aware of gender, there is little research evidence to support the view that gender differences in behaviour are innate (Davies, 1989; Coombe, 1988; Browne & France, 1986; Equal Opportunities Commission, 1992; Honig, 1983). Instead, the research indicates that most behavioural differences between boys and girls result from the different social experiences they have.

The aim of early childhood education is the development of the whole child. If we are neglecting or avoiding gender issues, we cannot rightly say we are living up to this expectation. However, traditional approaches to child observation may fail to reveal how the gender factor is being socially constructed in early childhood services. In this chapter, the ways in which each phase of the observation process may be susceptible to gender bias will be discussed, and recommendations for reorganising this process to support an anti-bias approach to gender in the early childhood curriculum will be made.

Practising an anti-bias approach to observation

Gathering observations of individual children

In recent Melbourne-based research (MacNaughton, 1994c) involving a Gender Equity Research Group (GERG), we found that reliance on individual developmental observations had effectively hidden the following gendered play patterns from early childhood staff:

- Play choices;
- Use of space; and
- Use of time.

1. **Play choices** Boys and girls regularly chose to play in very different areas. Girls played in gentle, passive and domestic play areas. Boys played in areas that allowed for adventure play, lots of action and lots of movement.
2. **Use of space** Boys and girls controlled the space they used differently. Boys controlled their space through physical aggression, girls through language. Girls avoided confrontation at all costs. Boys and girls also used auditory and physical space differently. Boys were louder and more expansive in their use of space.

   If boys moved into a space and girls anticipated a confrontation, they would leave. Boys would move in and try to take over space. They often used 'seek and destroy' missions to gain entry to a space they wanted. This involved dashing into an area and physically disrupting the play with a variety of noisy and aggressive actions.
3. **Use of time** Boys, through their aggression, often demanded and got more staff time. They also used time differently. They were less persistent than girls, wanted more immediate results for their efforts, changed direction often and, overall, concentrated for shorter periods of time.

Two early childhood staff involved in GERG explained what they learned about observing gender from this work:

> ***Carlie:*** Observation skills are often affected by what you are looking for, and those teachers that are not focused on gender issues perhaps do not see them . . .
>
> ***Heather:*** One of the things I'm finding is that I'm looking at things and I'm seeing things that I feel I should have seen previously. They seem so glaringly obvious now, but it's only because the categories and criteria that I'm using to observe are changing as I gather more information.

Organising information into developmental categories

Relying solely on developmental categories to organise observations often underestimates the significance of gender in children's development. If staff organise their information via child development categories (such as physical development and social development), they are often biased against using gender as an organisational category. Gender is understood as a subset of social development rather than as fundamentally constituting the child and is thus seen as only one facet of the child's development. It can therefore be observed through individual developmental observations. There is no particular reason to give it priority or pay special attention to it.

However, there is a large and increasing body of research that suggests all aspects of development are influenced by gender, class and 'race' and that gender is a major all-determining category of development rather than part of social development. (See, for example, Walkerdine, 1990; Gilligan et al., 1988; Epstein & Straub, 1991; Gilbert & Taylor, 1991.) This research suggests that gender needs to be understood as a way of being, thinking, experiencing and feeling that fundamentally drives and influences development (MacNaughton, 1994a, 1994b). Children's gender influences every aspect of their development, from their values, beliefs, language, emotion, imagination, cognition and style of communication to their involvement in physical activities, use of space and social relationships.

The words of three very traditionally gendered boys involved in GERG research (MacNaughton, 1992) vividly illustrate this point. Their daily lives were fundamentally influenced by gender, and hence their emotions, social relationships, language, ways of communicating and ways of thinking were inseparable from the fact of their being a traditional male.

Tim: Girls don't play blocks — that's for boys.

Adult: What happens when girls play with the blocks?

Tim: We knock them down.

……

Riad is pretending to have a baby when he is hit by Thomas.

Thomas: Boys don't have babies. That's why I hit Riad.

……

Lee: I can imaginate being a Connector *(a cartoon character).*

Adult: What does a Connector do?

Lee ***(with great enthusiasm and excitement):*** Connects like connects and transforms like then kills the baddies.

If gender is an all-pervasive, ever-present factor in children's development, it should be an all-pervasive, ever-present factor in our observations of children. We need to have it as a special and overarching category of observation, not just as a small subset of social development. However, just adding gender as a category to our observations is not sufficient by itself. It is also important to be aware of what specific aspects of the gender factor in children's development need to be challenged and/or supported through an anti-bias curriculum. Consequently, the categories staff use to interpret observations will be important.

Using child development categories to interpret observations

Child development categories orient staff towards looking for 'developmental progress' and limit their ability to recognise children's involvement in sexism. Observations of the gender factor taken by an early childhood staff member (Lee) while in GERG offer a good illustration of this process.

On entering GERG, Lee had a history of using child development categories to interpret her observations. When she reviewed what these observations told her of the gender relations between children she 'drew a blank', so she decided to deliberately examine how the gender factor was influencing children's play. She found that particular groups of boys regularly intimidated girls, often dominated collective play space, were generally expansive in their use of space and materials, and often invaded space which girls had been using.

Lee struggled to interpret what she learned using her child development knowledge. Tracing how children's social skills, physical skills or emotional development were implicated in what she had seen did not seem enough.

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When she recognised that the children's relationships often re-created sexist relationships in the wider social world, she began to rely on concepts of power and understandings of sexism to interpret her observations, exploring the gender politics of children's play as well as the developmental implications of it. Lee wanted to understand how children developed power relations between each other and what the effects of these power relationships were for girls and boys. She also needed to understand how sexism operated in children's play, not just how the children were developing as individuals. Consequently, Lee was drawn to ideas and language outside the normal realm of child development theory which helped her to think about the uneven power relationships between boys and girls in her centre that were creating sexist relationships.

Sexist power relationships are based on the idea that one gender role is more desirable and has more status than the other. They reflect what boys and girls have learned about how gender is practised and understood in their social world. As children learn about gender, they learn about the social practices and expectations that relate to gender in their culture. Specifically, their behaviours will be influenced by the extent to which they learn practices and understandings that promote gender equity and/or sexism. In other words, they will be influenced by the gender politics of their particular social world.

Australian research suggests that a majority of young children understand gender, their own and other people's, through the lens of sexism. By four years of age, many children have very sexist understandings of what it means to be male and female in Australian society (Davies, 1988; Connell, 1987; Sargent, 1986). From an early age, children limit their vision of themselves and other people, and the way they act for themselves and with other people, on the basis of gender. Children also re-create sexist relationships in their play with each other (Butterworth, 1991). Many of these relationships work directly against the interests of the girls, because within Western societies the male role and male activities have historically had more status. Within such relationships, girls are regularly disadvantaged educationally. Think, for instance, about how girls in Lee's centre might be disadvantaged by the gender politics of the boys' domination of space.

The development of sexist stereotyped behaviours, actions and knowledge in children can be understood as a practical outcome of sexism within the wider social, economic and cultural milieu. However, this does not mean it is any less 'real' in their day-to-day lives. Their beliefs and attitudes involve them in the creation and maintenance of sexism in and through their play. Therefore, we need to be alert to the gender politics of their play.

The gender politics of children's play may be expressed directly, or indirectly, through children's:

- Choice of friends;
- Choice of materials and activities;
- Reactions to other children and adults; and
- Play styles.

The following observations from the GERG project provide some flavour of how gender politics are expressed in children's play.

1. **Choice of friends** At four years of age, Sandra had decided the other gender was not worthy of friendship and had clear ideas about why she was making the choices she was. Her gender politics dismissed boys as trouble.

Glenda: I noticed in all the pictures I have taken of you playing in the sandpit, you never seem to play with any of the boys. Why is that?

Sandra *(shrugs her shoulders, grimaces and then laughs. Her laughter indicated I should know why.):* Cos they are mean.

Glenda: How are they mean?

Sandra: They pinch your bottom, they pull your hair. *(Thinks for a bit.)* They knock your blocks over.

Glenda: What do you think you can do about that?

Sandra: I don't like boys. They are not my friends.

2. **Choice of materials and activities** At three years of age, Shona had begun to choose the activities she would become involved in by her gender. She believed that what a person can do is limited by their gender. Her gender politics limited how she saw what was relevant to her as a girl.

Two girls were dressing up as nurses.

Adult: What about dressing up as a doctor? You both can be a doctor as well.

Shona: But I want to be a nurse.

Adult: Why do you want to be a nurse?

Shona: Because I'am a girl.

3. **Reactions to other children and adults** At five years of age, Fazil had begun to believe that boys and girls and men and women have different areas of competence and to use this knowledge in reacting to others.

A female early childhood practitioner was passing Fazil a cup of tea in the home-corner area.

Fazil: You've got a band-aid on.

Adult: Yes, I was cutting a big tree branch with my bow saw yesterday and the saw slipped. It cut through my glove and hurt my finger.

Fazil *(shaking his head and pointing his finger at the adult)***:** See, that's what happens when you use a saw. Women should only do the weeding.

Adult: No. I can use a saw and a drill and a hammer when I'm working in the garden. Sometimes I mow the grass and Bruce does the weeding. People just need to be careful when they're using tools.

Fazil *(rolling his eyes and shaking his head, with a facial expression of disbelief)***:** No! Girls have to stick to weeding.

4. **Play styles** At four and a half years of age, Tom believed that the worlds of boys and girls are, and should be, separate, and he used this understanding to influence how he chose to play with the girls. Tom's gender politics provided him with reasons for chasing and 'getting' girls.

Adult: Why is it that you never seem to play with any of the girls?

Tom: You see, girls and boys they are on different teams. That's why boys chase, chase like the girls. Boys get girls.

If we interpret these observations solely on the basis of traditional child development theory categories, then we would focus on what they can tell us about children's social, emotional, cognitive, physical and language development. For instance, the observation of Fazil enables us to comment on his ability to respond appropriately to the question asked by the adult (language skills), his ability to understand that people on different teams often have different interests from each other, and his ability to provide reasons for his behaviour (cognitive skills). It also enables us to comment on his gender development. He clearly recognises his own gender and that of other children, so his gender development is progressing 'normally' for his age.

However, from an anti-bias perspective, the significant feature of the observation is what it tells us about Fazil's involvement in gender politics. It suggests that Fazil is involved in sexist gender politics in which his traditionally masculine ways of acting are likely to impact negatively on the girls. The construction of power relations in children's play, and the gender effects of these relations, become central ideas which staff can use to interpret child observations. Staff need to examine their observations for examples of sexism in order to have a sound information base from which to plan to work against it.

Planning developmentally appropriate experiences on the basis of interpretations

If staff rely on child development as the only point of interpretation of children's play, then they are likely not to look for gender politics. If staff don't look for it, then it is unlikely they will see it, and therefore it is unlikely they can work against it. As one GERG member explained:

> ***Carlie:*** We all felt originally that we were definitely offering a non-sexist program because of our personal interest in the area. However, once we began to take more detailed records and time sheets of exactly where children were playing and with whom they were playing, we were shocked by the traditional sex-role stereotype patterns which began to emerge. It was surprising to see the power in children's relationships.

Using observations to evaluate the developmental appropriateness of planned experiences

Observations should be used to evaluate not only the developmental appropriateness of planned experiences but also the possible gender biases. Such evaluation enables staff to plan an anti-bias curriculum suited to children's needs, abilities and interests, and the particular gender politics of the group.

Summary

Practising an anti-bias approach to observation involves being alert to how gender bias influences observation and using strategies to minimise the likelihood of gender bias. An anti-bias approach to gender observation involves:

1. Gathering information on the gender dynamics between children;
2. Interpreting the significance of gender in children's development;

3. Increasing our ability to recognise children's involvement in sexism;
4. Maximising our opportunities to plan experiences which work against sexism and for gender equity through understanding how sexism operates within the centre; and
5. Evaluating our observational processes for gender bias.

Looking for gender dynamics

The first step in practising an anti-bias approach to observations is to look at the gender dynamics between children. This means looking beyond what individual children are doing for patterns in how boys and girls relate to each other. Staff need to explore the gender differences and similarities in how children are playing, where they are playing, who they are playing with, when they play in particular areas, and what happens when they play with each other. In other words, what are the dynamics between children that result from how they understand and practise their gender? For instance, 'Is there a gender difference in how boys and girls play with each other?', 'Is there a gender difference in who boys and girls are playing with?', and 'Which boys and which girls are playing or not playing with each other?'

There are many ways of collecting information about the gender dynamics between children, including anecdotal records, item sampling cards, interaction schedules, tape-recordings, photographs and video-recording.

- Anecdotal records involve staff noting down any incidents they observe between children that help them to answer questions about how the gender dynamics of the group are operating.
- Item sampling cards involve staff using cards to note down key gender dynamics they would like to observe. Each day, staff shuffle the cards and make notes from memory or from anecdotal records on the issue on the card for the day. This builds a picture over time of how the gender factor is influencing children's play patterns. For example, three item sampling cards could ask the following questions:

  — Where are the girls when the boys are in the home corner?

  — Where are the girls when the boys are in the block corner?

  — What did the boys do when they were in the home corner — traditional or non-traditional role-play?

- Interaction schedules or checklists enable staff to quickly note down what is happening when a specific event occurs, such as when children move into the home corner. Schedules and checklists enable staff to build a detailed picture of patterns or issues that arise often. The checklists could be used to monitor who is playing where, if there are boys and girls playing together, if boys and girls are exploring non-traditional gender roles, who first enters an activity area, and who initiates disputes, when, and who is involved.

- Tape-recordings can be used to record children's conversations in particular play areas or staff conversations with children. They can also be used at the end of a session to comment on gender dynamics between children. However, for the recordings to be useful, staff need to have the time to listen to them.
- Photographs taken at regular time intervals or when critical incidents happen can help staff to recall the details of children's play dynamics at a later date.
- Video-taping children at play enables staff to look more closely at the detailed dynamics of children's play once the 'hustle and bustle' of the day is over. They can also be used to discuss the play dynamics with other staff and with parents. However, video-taping can be expensive and time-consuming, so it is important that time is spent reviewing the tapes to make the investment worthwhile. If this is possible, they can, as Heather explains, alert staff to subtle nuances in the gender dynamics between children.

> ***Heather:*** Even though I was aware that often the boys would use the block area and the girls would not use it, especially when the boys were in there, I wasn't really aware of the dynamics of the group in terms of use of space . . . Then, if you examine it through video, you can see why they moved away . . . I definitely noticed that the boys and girls don't play together . . . but the negotiation of space was something that wasn't really brought to my consciousness until we'd talked about it . . .

The choice of method will depend on the resources staff have available. It is important to remember that the simpler the method, the more likely it is staff will find the time to use it during a busy working day with children. Also, several of the low-tech methods can be used to involve parents, other staff, students and the children themselves in monitoring the gender dynamics of the centre. Julie explains how, with the assistance of parents, she combined several of these approaches to gain an understanding of how gender influenced children's play choices.

> ***Julie:*** Activities in the home corner were monitored closely for two weeks with the assistance of parents, with the purpose of collecting quantitative and qualitative data regarding the frequency of choosing the activity, the duration of time spent there, and the children's interactions, including taped conversations.

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When staff learn to look for the gender factor and track the gender dynamics between children, then gender pervades all of their observations and thus becomes an overarching category through which they organise their information. As Julie explained, 'I can't *not* see gender now, it's become all-pervasive.'

Interpreting the significance of gender

Identifying the significance of gender in children's development involves:

- Exploring how gender influences a child's choice of activities, how a child approaches experiences, a child's language, how a child approaches another, a child's sense of what is fair or not, how a child views physical activity, and who a child chooses as friends.
- Thinking about how the gender politics between the children influence each of these aspects of a child's life. For instance, is a child's choice of friends and activities being influenced by how others are exercising power over her/him? Are some children avoiding certain areas because of how other children are using them? Is gender a factor in this? To what extent are girls limiting their play experiences to avoid areas where boys are?

Recognising sexism

Tracking the gender politics of children's play increases staff's ability to recognise children's sexism. However, to recognise sexism, it is important to have a clear understanding of how it operates. As discussed earlier, sexism involves the operation of power relationships by one gender over another; recognising sexism involves thinking about who is benefiting from the dynamics of the gender politics between particular children. Traditionally, men and boys have exercised power over girls and women to the latter's disadvantage. If boys are regularly benefiting, then it is likely that staff are observing sexism at work. The research reviewed above suggests that sexist practices, attitudes, and values and beliefs are likely to influence where children play, who they play with, and how they play with each other. It will be important to check the gender politics of each of these components of children's play choices.

Challenging sexism and promoting gender equity

Seeing sexism is the key to staff's ability to maximise their opportunities to plan experiences which work against sexism and for gender equity. If sexism is not being seen, then it cannot be counteracted. Putting in place an anti-bias approach to observation makes it more likely that staff will see how sexism is operating between children in their particular group and thus provide a sense of how to deal with it. Within an anti-bias approach to challenging sexism, some basic principles can be used to guide the specific plans staff make to challenge sexism within, and between, specific children. Broadly, these principles are:

- Be prepared to challenge sexist attitudes and behaviours.
- Ensure that you protect the child or adult who has been treated unfairly.
- Explain what you think is unfair about their attitudes and behaviours and why. If appropriate, model anti-sexist attitudes and behaviours.
- Correct any incorrect and sexist assumptions a child has about gender.
- Plan a strategy for how to deal with a similar situation in the future. (Based on Derman-Sparks & the ABC Task Force, 1989)

Working for greater gender fairness and greater gender equity between boys and girls requires ongoing alertness to how gender relations are being portrayed in all aspects of the curriculum to ensure that positive attitudes towards gender equity are being actively encouraged and supported. This involves reviewing:

- Curriculum resources and materials;
- Adult language and interactions; and
- Curriculum goals and learning experiences.

1. **Curriculum resources and materials** Finding posters, puzzles, songs and stories that offer children alternative ways of understanding female and male roles in society is critical to anti-bias approaches to gender equity. It can be a time-consuming task and may sometimes require staff to develop their own resources. There are many checklists that can help staff to choose gender-fair resources. Broadly, these checklists suggest checking all illustrations, characterisation and language to ensure that they promote positive but diverse images of the achievements, abilities and ambitions of women and girls and offer anti-sexist images of masculinity to boys. (See, for example, MacNaughton, 1993; Neugebauer, 1992; George, 1990; Browne & France, 1986; MacNaughton et al., 1986.)
2. **Adult language and interactions** Adults can actively encourage gender-fair, anti-sexist relations between children by always using non-sexist language, avoiding gender-stereotyped comments and modelling anti-sexist behaviours. They will also need to actively seek opportunities to involve the children in group action to challenge sexism and encourage the children to critically reflect on their own relationships with each other. (See, for example, MacNaughton, 1994a; Derman-Sparks, 1992; Leipzig, 1992; Butterworth, 1991; Perritt, 1988; Thomas, 1986.)
3. **Curriculum goals and learning experiences** Curriculum goals and learning experiences should be reviewed to ensure that they are consistent with encouraging greater gender equity. However, the specific ways in which staff work for gender equity are likely to build from the

understandings, needs and interests of the children. It may be decided to work with the children and parents to change gender-segregated play patterns, to encourage children to think about and experience a greater diversity of roles, and to challenge sexism between children. Whatever the goals, it is important that they encourage gender-fairness and work against sexism. (See, for example, MacNaughton, 1993a; Hardcastle Stanford, 1992; Matsumoto-Grah, 1992; Browne, 1991.)

Central to evaluating the success of these strategies is an accurate information base about how children are constructing and understanding gender relations in the curriculum. Evaluating approaches to observation for potential biases that could mask children's learning in this area is therefore critical in practising an anti-bias approach to gender in the early childhood curriculum.

Evaluating gender biases

Several simple questions can help staff to evaluate any gender biases in their approach to observation. These questions build from the issues covered in this chapter so far, and staff implementing an anti-bias approach to observation should be able to answer 'yes' to each question.

- Do I gather information about the gender dynamics between children in my group?
- Do I have information about how children's play choices, use of space and use of time are influenced by gender?
- Do I understand that focusing on individual children can bias what I learn about gender relations between children?
- Do I understand how gender influences all areas of a child's development?
- Do I have information about the gender politics between children?
- Can I recognise sexist gender politics between children?
- Do I regularly check my approach to observation to see if I know how the gender factor influences each child in my group?

Putting it all together: a practical task

The following experience can be used to practise anti-bias approaches to observing gender. First read the observation and then work through the questions in the section 'For further thought and discussion'. The observation details play between several four-year-old children in the home-corner area of a child care centre.

Two boys (James and Fred) enter the home corner speaking very loudly and moving all around the space where three girls (Annette, Ee-ling and Gretta) are setting the table for a party. The girls ignore their presence and the boys leave after a few seconds.

Thirty seconds later, the boys re-enter. James throws material from the table on the floor and leaves, followed by Fred. Gretta goes to the adult (Trish) for help.

Thirty seconds later the boys enter the home corner for the third time, approach the table and start shouting. They knock objects from the table one at a time. Annette sits quietly at the table playing with the rings on her fingers while the toys are being knocked to the floor. The other girls have left the home corner.

Annette looks at an adult nearby and says, 'The boys just knocked it over.' The adult asks, 'Do you feel happy about that?' Annette replies, 'No' and is asked what she will do about it. She says, 'Do it all over.'

During this exchange, the boys leave the home corner and the girls return. Within seconds of the girls' return to the table, the boys re-enter and shout at the girls, 'Throw it in the air.' In response, all the girls leave.

James starts singing a Ninja turtle song, and he is joined by Fred and Barry who start rough-and-tumble play on the floor in the centre of the home-corner. Within seconds, the boys have begun a hide-and-seek game in which they move all around the home-corner space.

As the adult (Trish) moves into the home corner, the boys leave and the girls re-enter. The adult comments, 'The home corner is very untidy now. What will happen about that?' Annette replies, 'We'll tidy it up . . .' and she moves off and starts tidying the home corner. Later, Annette is heard to comment, 'Mummies pick things up, even children at school, make drinks, make coffee. They don't do painting, they help daddy', and 'Daddies eat fruit and biscuits and drinks. They don't tidy at all.'

Conclusion

It is not surprising that young children see the world as divided into two distinct genders. The first thing adults ask when a child is born is, 'Is it a boy or a girl?' Once that biological fact is established, an ongoing and often unconscious process of building boys and girls begins. Look at children's toy catalogues, television advertisements, and so on. Very often the worlds of males and females are distinct and very separate.

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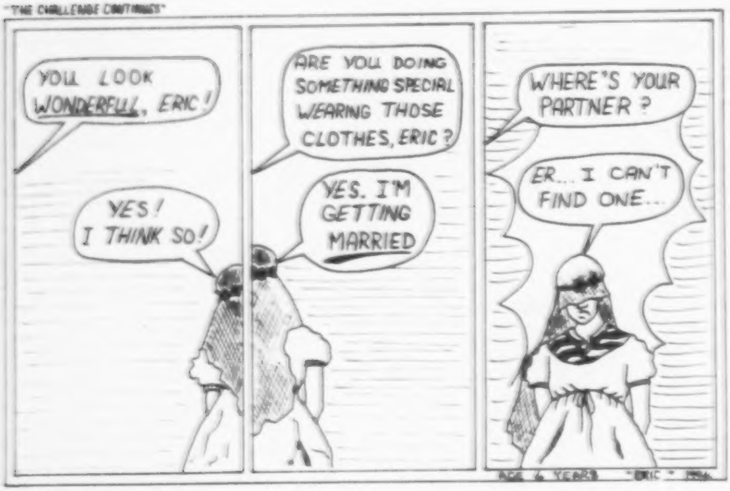
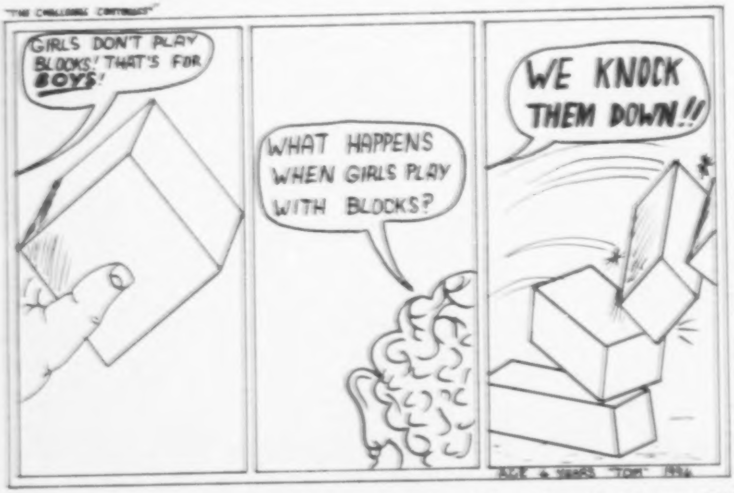
The challenge in anti-bias approaches to gender is twofold: to be alert to the specific ways in which the gender factor may be operating to create unfair relationships and practices in children's daily lives, and to work for greater fairness in gender relationships. As the following incidents from Melbourne early childhood centres indicate, children are keenly aware of the gender factor in their play. The challenge to create gender-fair relationships in early childhood settings must therefore continue.


"THE CHALLENGE CONTINUES"
YOU LOOK WONDERFUL, ERIC!
YES! I THINK SO!
ARE YOU DOING SOMETHING SPECIAL WEARING THOSE CLOTHES, ERIC?
YES. I'M GETTING MARRIED
WHERE'S YOUR PARTNER?
ER... I CAN'T FIND ONE...
AGE 4 YEARS "ERIC" 1994

1. The challenge continues: Eric (Hughes, 1994)


"THE CHALLENGE CONTINUES"
GIRLS DON'T PLAY BLOCKS! THAT'S FOR BOYS!
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN GIRLS PLAY WITH BLOCKS?
WE KNOCK THEM DOWN!!
AGE 4 YEARS "TOM" 1994

2. The challenge continues: Tom (Hughes, 1994)

Cartoons reproduced with the permission of Research and Networking for Gender Equity in Early Childhood (RANGE)

For further thought and discussion

1. What information did you gain about the gender dynamics between the children in the boxed observation on p. 65? For instance, what information does it offer about how children's play choices, use of space and use of time are influenced by gender?
2. What can you learn from the observation about the significance of gender in children's development? For instance, is there evidence about how gender influences all areas of a child's development? What other information would you need to gain this evidence?
3. If you focused solely on individual children in the observation, how could this bias what you have learned about gender relations between children?
4. What are the gender politics evident in the observation? For instance:
   (a) Who uses the home corner when?
   (b) How often is it boys only, and which boys? What roles do they take on? How do they play and use materials?
   (c) How often is it girls only, and which girls? What roles do they take on? How do they play and use materials?
   (d) How often is it both boys and girls? When this is the case, what roles are each playing?
   (e) Where are the adults when these things are happening?
5. To what extent are the gender politics sexist? Can you explain your answer?
6. How could tracking the gender politics within the observation maximise your opportunity to plan experiences which work against sexism and for gender equity?
7. What have you learned about your ability to evaluate your observational processes for gender bias?

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CHAPTER
5

Responding to Special Needs

ANNE PALMER

> *Look at that really funny little man.*
>
> *How disgusting, why haven't you got an ear?*
>
> *I won't hold Gemma's yucky hand.*
>
> *She shouldn't be allowed at preschool; the other children might catch something.*

The first three statements were made by children, and the last by a teacher. To have a philosophy and a curriculum that promotes anti-bias, we must be prepared and able to acknowledge and address common stereotypes of differences and disability.

What is 'normal' is expected and accepted; what is different results in discomfort and non-acceptance. Somehow in the process of socialisation, our culture passes on to children an understanding of what is acceptable and what is different. Each person has a limit to how much variation from the norm, of ability, appearance and behaviour, they can cope with and feel comfortable with.

To find out how children acquire their attitude to differences, we can look at ourselves. What information were we given about disability and differences? What were our past experiences, and what social and cultural environments have produced and continued to affect our attitudes?

Let me first define the differences that we notice. Difference may be due to physical, sensory, intellectual or emotional impairments. Not all impairments result in disabilities. Some may only disable a person from doing some things. Some impairments, such as scars, facial deformities or extra digits, produce no disability at all. Other conditions do not result in a person having a different physical appearance but affect the way they behave or interact with people.

Most people find it easy to understand physical impairments. If a person is born without arms, we can see how this physical difference affects them. Obviously they cannot do things arms are used for, but they will probably become adept at using other parts of their body to do these things. In many situations their physical difference should have no effect on their abilities. Are arms essential for communicating, thinking, relating to other people and learning? The problem is that, by looking different, people are often more disabled by others' attitudes and reactions to the differences than by the effects of the impairment.

Young children notice and react to differences and may get responses from their parents or early childhood staff that reinforce stereotypes. How did we, as children, get information and develop attitudes about differences? Awareness of how this happened, coupled with an understanding of the common stereotypes and a realisation of the inappropriate responses to disability, is the starting point for promoting anti-bias attitudes and empowering children with disabilities.

Most people who have seen another person affected by such things as cancer, burns, disfigurement or impairment experience a fleeting feeling of horror, regret, pity, fear, charity or sadness. Questions confront us: 'Why him and not me?', 'Does she know what she is missing out on?' , 'Why is there such suffering?' 'How should I react?', 'How sad', 'What a shame.' We react with powerful feelings of discomfort and unease.

We must acknowledge that these feelings exist despite our being conditioned to deny and not discuss these reactions. Responses and questions have developed from our past experiences and our culture's attitudes towards disabilities.

Historical perspective

In pre-industrial communities, the birth of a child with disabilities caused hardship for those who struggled just to survive. Nomadic people, hunters and subsistence farmers could not sustain children who were severely disabled. For many, the constraints put on them by their lifestyles left no option but to place the needs of the community before the survival of individuals.

Myths and superstitions evolved to justify the mystery of the birth of a child with disabilities, or a tragic event resulting in a healthy child becoming disfigured or disabled. Folk beliefs and religion incorporated these superstitions which have become part of some cultures. A common theme in many cultures is that the tragedy of a child with disfigurements or disabilities is a punishment, a test of faith or the result of a supernatural force.

It is common in many cultures that people with certain disabilities are shunned for fear of attracting harm or 'bad luck'. In my family, it was considered unlucky to discuss a disability in the presence of a pregnant woman, or even to prepare for the baby as this might increase the chance of the pregnancy not progressing well.

In Australia, an attitude of 'out of sight out of mind' meant that people with disabilities were hidden from the mainstream of life, either at home or in segregated institutions. Encouraged by the medical professions, it was believed that both family and child were better off if the child was institutionalised. Care of the child with disabilities was considered an act of pity and charity.

In the 1920s, charity organisations emerged to care and protect the 'unfortunate'. These private and government-run institutions fostered the segregation of people with disabilities from the rest of society. Charities needed to encourage people to feel sorry or pity for people with disabilities and thus donate money to these 'worthy' causes. Generally, people with disabilities were stereotyped as helpless, powerless and needing to be pitied. The religious and other charity groups caring for people with disabilities reinforced the idea that 'ordinary' people did not have the compassion or dedication to provide the care needed.

The 1960s saw the beginning of change as people began to recognise the inequality and discrimination suffered by people who were different in appearance or ability. The concept of 'normalisation' acknowledged all people's rights to a lifestyle, education, family life, employment and opportunities available to people without disabilities.

Confronting our biases

Our attitudes to disability and differences are deeply embedded in our culture, history, language, literature, media and religions. We must recognise the bias that we each have. At this point, most people think, 'My attitudes are OK, I just have to work on other people's unjust attitudes.' This is denying very powerful emotional responses we all have to differences and disability.

For some early childhood staff, the idea of caring for children with very different abilities, appearances or behaviour is threatening. These children are gaining access to the mainstream of care and education, and while some professionals feel positive about this and welcome the challenges that come with it, others feel concerned about the increased responsibility and lack of support which they associate with the inclusion of these children in their program. The terms 'special needs' and 'additional needs' reinforce the expectation that these children require 'extraordinary' care above what should reasonably be expected. 'Additional' implies extra work and a commitment which people may feel unwilling to make.

Busy, committed staff may feel it is their duty to promote an anti-bias curriculum without consideration of their own confidence in relating positively to disability. Our best intentions to implement an anti-bias curriculum can be frustrated by our own attitude to disability, even if we believe we have a positive attitude. Our attitudes and responses will affect the quality of our interactions with children and adults with disabilities. Our responses provide a role model to the children we care for. These children are learning about disability and developing their own ways of responding.

You may feel that attitudes are changing and that differences in human appearance, capabilities and behaviour are beginning to be accepted. Some people with differences in ability are being seen in public places. People with hearing, vision and physical impairments such as paraplegia and amputations are gaining some acceptance and access to services and opportunities we expect as rights. Yet only a limited range of human differences are tolerated. While a person using a wheelchair may have become a public figure, or be seen behind a desk in a government office, where are the people with severe facial disfigurements? People with diseases such as Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV — the virus that causes AIDS) and Hansen's disease (previously called leprosy) are discriminated against, threatened and denied equal opportunity because of their medical condition. There are still limits to what people will accept, although tolerance is increasing.

It is important that people are honest about their own feelings. To deny real and powerful feelings of discomfort about the conditions that upset us is dishonest. When we look at children's fears, curiosity and attitudes, we must remember that as children, we too had these feelings. How can we answer children's questions and provide a positive role model if we are still uncomfortable about aspects of disability ourselves?

We can become more confident and comfortable about disability but may still feel a certain amount of discomfort and stress from the appearance of certain conditions. We may be able to hide our responses from other people, but it is important to acknowledge these feelings in ourselves.

Is it honest to have a curriculum that focuses on similarities and not differences, when all humans presented with images of a person who is very different will be curious about the differences? Is it honest to have a positive attitude of acceptance at one level, yet to deny actual physical stress when exposed to one of the conditions that are outside our present comfort zone?

To illustrate this point, people are usually honest in admitting that they find the disfigurements that result from severe burns difficult to deal with. The frequent response to seeing the results of severe burns for the first time can be physically measured. Indicators of increased physical stress, such as increases in blood pressure, heart rate and temperature, result. These are normal human reactions to stress. To achieve an anti-bias curriculum, we must first accept that it is natural and normal to feel uncomfortable when confronted by difference. This is not a negative reaction but the first step in developing positive attitudes.

Fostering positive attitudes

Do confidence and caregiving skills indicate positive attitudes? People in the caring professions, such as nursing, medicine, teaching and child care, and siblings and parents of people with disabilities still need to think carefully about their attitudes. Often relationships are based on dependence, responsibility and duty, rather than on attributes that promote self-worth, independence and equity. It is a challenge to provide the necessary support and care without disempowering the person with the disability.

Early childhood staff often inadvertently create disempowering relationships when asking peers to do things for a child with a disability. Helping and caring behaviours should be encouraged, but the challenge is for the relationship to be positive. Healthy, balanced attitudes towards peers with disabilities can never develop in a situation of dependence or responsibility.

Compare these two scenarios involving groups of three to five year-olds:

Most children can tie their own shoelaces, but there are several children in the group who cannot. At home time, children are encouraged to quickly put on their shoes and sit waiting for the teacher to tie the laces of those needing help. A new child has joined the group. Karlin has cerebral palsy and has great difficulty with fine motor skills. The teacher announces that Karlin has special problems and needs help from the other children. At the time shoes are put on, the teacher says, 'Jenna, you have done your shoes. Why don't you help Karlin?' Jenna goes up to Karlin and without saying anything does up her laces. The teacher says, 'That was good of you to help Karlin. That can be your job each day.'

In another group, when it is time to put on shoes, the teacher says, 'When you have done your shoes, ask one of your friends if they would like some help.' The teacher discourages the development of dependence by adding, 'Maybe your friend will only need a little help. Let them do as much as they can. Always ask people first to see if they want help. Some people like to do it themselves even if it takes a little longer.'

Jake has congenital amputations of fingers on one hand. Once the teacher has modelled how to hold one side of Jake's shoe buckles so that he can use the ability he has to do up his shoes himself, he is no different from the several other children being assisted by his peers.

In the second scenario, Jake's independence is being encouraged and his peers are expected to relate to him in the same way as they relate to the other children who need help.

Attempts are often made to promote positive attitudes and understanding of the differences caused by disabilities by using an approach whereby children are led through a guided tour of a disability. I am wary of simulation exercises which attempt to increase sensitivity to disability through activities where children cannot see, hear or walk. The cognitive development of young children limits their appreciation of other points of view. Children's self-directed play and exploration of these ideas often leads to role-play of

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helplessness and pity. While we should encourage caring attitudes, we should intervene if the 'person' who has the disability takes on a role that promotes negative stereotyped attitudes towards people with disabilities.

Young children have difficulty thinking in abstract terms, so it is best to use real experiences to help develop understanding. It is far better to use opportunities to relate your explanation to an experience that is meaningful to children. Video material or brief one-off visits from guests with disabilities encourage children to focus on novel differences without providing real opportunities to make sense of what they see.

Biased language

In the media and in playgrounds, the terms 'spastic', 'cripple' and 'moron' are used as insults. The media use 'victim', 'confined to a wheelchair' and 'sufferer' to elicit emotive responses and to further attitudes of despair, hopelessness and pity. Negative labels and language that focus on differences are counter-productive to anti-bias.

Do not label people as victims or sufferers. Avoid using terms such as 'invalid', 'confined', 'stricken' and 'afflicted'. They indicate dependency and defeat. These labels detract from people's self-image and self-esteem. Negative labels continue to promote within the community negative attitudes of helplessness and pity for people with disabilities.

Discourage the use in a derogatory way of terms such as 'dumb', 'cripple', 'spastic' and 'moron'. Be aware that some of these terms — for example, spastic — have specific medical meanings. Be careful how you respond when a child uses these descriptions. A dramatic response from you might encourage the child to use the terms. It is best to paraphrase the child's statement, giving a role model of more acceptable language.

Always refer to the person first, and only refer to their condition if it is absolutely necessary. As an example, the sentence, 'We have a Down Syndrome baby in our centre' emphasises the disability rather than the child. The infant is a person first, with the same value and rights as all children in the centre. If it was essential to convey this information, then 'One of the babies in our centre has Down Syndrome' is a more just description.

Do not reinforce stereotypes about groups of people with the same conditions. We all share similarities and differences, and the value of human diversity must be respected.

Child: Mark can't walk because he is a cripple.

Adult: Mark cannot walk because his legs are not strong enough. He and you both like sitting in the sand patch to play.

……

Child: Stacy talks funny and has a yucky mouth.

Adult: Stacy's speech is hard to understand because she was very sick when she was a baby. She finds it hard to talk clearly and to swallow her saliva. She tries very hard to talk to you and enjoys your company.

……

Child: Walter is really bad. He doesn't do what you tell him.

Adult: Walter cannot hear the sounds my voice makes. He knows I am trying to talk to him, but it does not make any sense to him. If you could not understand what I was saying, would you be bad? Now it is time to wash our hands. If you do yours, Walter can watch and then he will know what to do.

This paraphrasing strategy enables adults to give the child truthful and understandable information while role-modelling more acceptable descriptions of differences. It also gives the child with the disability feedback as to how they are perceived by you. Children with different appearances may only have non-disabled role models, and your feedback will help them to develop a more accurate self-image.

In the examples above, Mark's caregiver could ask the child to lift a safe but heavy item. 'Your muscles are not strong enough to lift that box, just like Mark's are not strong enough to walk.' Walter's caregiver could relate the explanation to a past experience. 'Remember when Elemer and Katalin came to dance for us? They were talking their language, which was Hungarian. We couldn't understand them. That is how Walter feels when we are talking.'

We must be well prepared to give instant, honest answers that allow children to ask more questions as needed. The following is an example of a situation where, despite my efforts, I did not answer the question asked.

A friend had a much wanted and awaited baby who was born with a medical condition that restricted her life to a few days. My son asked when the baby would come home. He was only three, so I explained that she was very sick and would not get better and would soon die. He asked how the doctors knew she would die. I answered that parts of her body did not work properly and could not do the things bodies do to live. He appeared satisfied with this and changed the subject. Some days later, he asked me why babies work? Careful probing got me to the point of the question. His cognitive ability only allowed one meaning for the word 'work'. The concrete meaning of work, to do a job, was far more meaningful than the more abstract meaning of functioning.

This was a very difficult subject to deal with and I doubt that I could have done any better, but it does serve to demonstrate the problems of developmentally appropriate explanations.

Many children do not have opportunities to learn about human differences from experience. Well-meaning parents often do not give satisfactory answers to questions. Children are confused by mixed messages and instructions such as 'It's rude to stare', when they experience the puzzle of people different from their previous experiences. Children's opportunities for interaction with people who are different are usually limited, their natural curiosity is discouraged, and adults may find it difficult to give honest and open explanations to their questions.

Practical strategies

Supporting children with disabilities

- Provide accessible play at a level appropriate to all areas of children's development. Play is a basic right for all children and the natural way for children to learn about each other. The pleasures and frustrations of play are a shared similarity between children.
- Never allow yourself to feel sorry for children with disabilities. Feel compassion and even anger about the unfairness of the situation, but pity is not helpful.
- Always give children honest feedback about their achievements. Be honest with them and give correct information in terms they understand.
- Encourage effort rather than outcome. Accept all achievements, and help children to set reasonable challenges.
- Become familiar with the impairment or condition and any restrictions that result.
- Do not overprotect children. Understand the constraints that the children's conditions put on them, but allow them to explore, play and take risks just as any child does.
- Strive for a team approach with parents so that they can give you information to help provide the best possible opportunities for their children.
- Stand back and let children be as independent as possible. Do not underestimate the child's abilities or persistence. By not expecting enough from children, adults often give up long before the children would.
- Do not become too emotionally involved. Emotional involvement will affect your ability to be a consistent and dependable adult.
- Do not fuss about the special equipment or care the children require. Do not resent the time and effort needed to use special equipment, as this will influence the children's attitude to it.

- Respect the children's identities and differences. This includes any special equipment they use. Never allow other children to use equipment without the children's permission.

Supporting the other children

- Children's behaviour is strongly influenced by what they see other people doing. How you relate to the child with special needs will be reflected by the other children. Encourage positive interactions between children and accept that negative experiences will occur as children explore their feelings and each other.

If there are no children with disabilities in your service, posters may raise issues for discussion

- Children can be caring and concerned and should be allowed to help other children if this is appropriate. Acknowledge helping behaviours while encouraging independence for both children. This requires sensitivity to both children's needs.

> *You are a good friend helping Sarah put away the play dough. Now let's see you both clean the table.*

- Be honest and open when asked questions about disability. Use positive language and focus on similarities as well as differences between children.

- Be alert to the child who becomes overprotective, cruel or anxious about the child with a disability. All children have their own special needs and may need support in developing appropriate relationships. Give extra attention to children showing signs of stress and try tactfully to find out if they have a misapprehension or concern. Encouraging age-appropriate interactions with shared activities may help to overcome initial reservations.
- Advise parents about their child's reactions so that they can support their child with correct information. Parents may also want to be informed about the disability or condition, although always ensure that confidentiality is maintained. Have resource information available for parents.

Supporting yourself

- Accept your own limitations, as you can do just so much. Be flexible, realistic and creative about how you solve problems. Enjoy the challenges you face. Leave your work at work. Get help when you need it and do not expect too much of yourself. Find someone with whom you can talk about your experiences.
- Keep records of the children's progress no matter how small the gains are, and reward yourself for your achievements.
- Become an advocate for children with disabilities and set your sights on promoting positive attitudes.

Supporting the parents of children with disabilities

- Do not pity or patronise parents, but acknowledge the difficulties they face.
- Establish an open and warm relationship, encouraging them to see you and themselves as part of a team that will work towards supporting them and their children.
- Assure parents that confidentialities will be maintained and never break this trust. Give parents honest feedback but stated in positive terms.

  James is not joining in yet, but it is good for him to see how the other children play together.

  Mi Lam still cries after you leave, but for much less time than when she started.

- If children have communication difficulties, inform the parents about their daily experiences. Tell the parents who the child's friends are, what they enjoy or dislike, and any interesting events of the day. Home time might be too hectic to stop and talk, so a notebook is a good idea. Parents can also pass on messages and 'news' via the notebook.

Supporting the other staff

- Be aware of how your attitude towards children with disabilities will determine the attitude of the other staff. How they relate to the children will depend on mutual expectations of your own and their role with the children with special needs.
- Encourage the staff to share in the care of the children and encourage them to interact with them.
- If the children use special equipment, encourage the staff to become familiar with its correct use and care. Do not become the 'expert' on all children with disabilities. Encourage people to see that their own understanding about child development and care of children will enable them to meet the needs of all children. By all means share your expertise and information on resources in the community.
- Do not off-load your problems on staff or expect special treatment because you work with children with disabilities. Caring for young children is a rewarding and challenging occupation, but it may also at times be stressful and tiring.

For further thought and discussion

1. Discuss attitudes to people with disabilities in past times with your parents or grandparents.
2. Watch the film *Rain Man*. How do people react to the strange behaviour of the man with autism? How would you feel in a public place with him? How would you have felt if he was your brother and you were 13 years old?
3. Discuss and compare attitudes to disability with a person from a different cultural background.
4. Explore your feelings about working with children with disabilities. Are you comfortable? Why? Why not? What implications does this have for you in your work with young children?

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CHAPTER
6

Linguistic Diversity

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Photograph: Cathy Laudenbach

Australia has always been a linguistically diverse country. Before European settlement of Australia there were approximately 250 distinct Aboriginal languages, each having a number of dialects (Walsh, 1993). Today there are many languages spoken in Australia, reflecting the ethnic diversity of the Australian population.

Migrants and refugees from a diverse range of countries have settled in Australia, bringing with them many different languages and cultures. Although people of Anglo-Celtic background have always dominated in numbers and power, people from southern European, Asian and Middle-Eastern backgrounds also began arriving in Australia from the beginning of the 19th century. For example, Chinese people came to work in the goldfields and to set up market gardens; people from Lebanon and other Middle-Eastern countries settled in Australia and were responsible for much of the building of the Overland Telegraph; and Pacific Islanders, known as Kanaks, were brought to Australia to work in the canefields. In this way, languages other than English have been spoken in Australia since the beginnings of European settlement.

Racist government policies and community attitudes sent many of these non-English speaking peoples back to their home country at the beginning of the 20th century. The *Immigration Restriction Act* of 1901, commonly known as the White Australia Policy, was designed specifically to keep 'coloured', non-English speaking people out of Australia, and was not revoked until 1973. However, after the Second World War, when the Australian government's motto was 'populate or perish', Britain was no longer able to provide migrants in sufficient numbers to meet Australia's demands. The *Immigration Restriction Act* was relaxed slightly to 'broaden the net' for suitable migrants. This led to a new influx of migrants from diverse language backgrounds. Many of these people were from European countries such as Greece, Italy, Poland and Hungary, as well as Middle-Eastern nations such as Turkey. From 1973, Asian nations became an increasing source of migrants and refugees, particularly South East Asian nations such as Vietnam.

Although there was often strong pressure to assimilate to the Australian way of life, and to speak only English, many migrants managed to maintain their home language. Clyne (1991) suggests that there are between 75 and 100 'immigrant' or community languages other than English spoken in Australia today. Data from the 1991 census indicates that 17.4 per cent of Australians speak a language other than English at home. This is higher than the 13.6 per cent reported in the 1986 census.

These census figures do not include children under the age of five, so it can be assumed that the number of speakers of community languages other than English would be much higher if young children were included. Figures would also be much higher if languages spoken in the parents' home were included, as many people speak a language other than English with parents and/or grandparents. Others may be able to understand the language of their parents and/or grandparents, but speak very little, and these details also impact on the accuracy of the figures provided by the census.

The community languages other than English found to be most widely spoken in Australia were Italian, Greek, Serbo-Croatian, Chinese, Arabic and then German. The languages that are most widely spoken will vary from one area to another, with Italian, Greek, German, Maltese, Polish, Dutch and Serbo-Croatian the most predominant in Melbourne, and Arabic, Spanish, Portuguese and Chinese in Sydney (Clyne, 1991). It is interesting to note that the languages offered for study in schools in these cities do not usually reflect these trends.

Diverse dialects

Linguistic diversity also includes the different ways of speaking English, or the different dialects of English, and the language of people who are hearing impaired. There are a number of different dialects spoken by Australians, which are influenced by the geographical area people live in and/or the social groups with which they are affiliated. Dialects include the Standard Australian English spoken by newsreaders and 'well-educated' Australians, rural dialects, Aboriginal English and so on. Many Australians are bidialectal, speaking different dialects in different situations. For example, an Aboriginal person may speak Standard Australian English in their job as a school teacher, and Aboriginal English with their family members.

Dialects originally occur because of distance between people, whether real or perceived. This may be geographical distance, resulting in different types of English being spoken in Canada compared to Australia, or rural New South Wales compared to Sydney; or social distance, resulting in dialects being spoken by different racial, cultural or socioeconomic groups — for example, Aboriginal English. The distance between groups of people helps to maintain the differences between dialects, as distinct ways of speaking are often a means of maintaining group solidarity.

As children are growing up they learn the dialect that is spoken by their family and community. This is part of the socialisation process and mostly occurs unconsciously. It needs to be remembered that children who speak dialects that differ from the dominant dialect are not speaking 'slang', nor do they have 'bad' or 'poor' language. Instead, they have successfully learned the language of their speech community.

Differences between dialects occur at all levels of language: vocabulary, meaning, grammar and pronunciation, as well as social aspects of language such as the ways people interact with each other, ask questions and so on. For example, there may be differences between Aboriginal English and other dialects of English in terms of vocabulary, such as the use of the word 'gubba' to refer to non-Aboriginal people. Meanings of words may also be different — for example, 'brother' may refer to all Aboriginal people, not just blood relations.

The grammar of the language may also be different. For example, Aboriginal English sentences may be long and complex and include noun group duplication, such as 'the policeman he heard this banging and . . .', or double negatives, such as 'I didn't never do it.' These differences in grammar are generally the ones that carry the most stigma and result in some people making judgements that the language spoken is 'bad' or 'inferior'. These attitudes are often then generalised to the speaker, who is assumed to be poorly educated or lazy.

Differences in the social aspects of language may include things such as the way stories are told or the way questions are asked, as well as non-verbal aspects of language such as avoiding eye-contact as a means of showing respect. As one example of this, Eades (1985) has documented the sociolinguistic rules of speakers of Aboriginal English in south-east Queensland, and found that in order to obtain information it is preferable to 'have a talk' rather than ask direct questions. 'Having a talk' means that both people share information. The person who wants to obtain information starts out by stating what they already know — for example, 'I hear Bobby was down your place last night.' Often these statements act as triggers, if the information seeker waits for a reply. While in non-Aboriginal culture it may generally be assumed that everyone has the right to ask questions and that a reply can be expected, this is not always the case in Aboriginal communities. Knowledge has different meanings, not everyone has the right to know information, and individuals have the right not to answer questions (Eades, 1985; Malin, 1990).

Differences such as these are often very subtle and operate at an unconscious level. Sociolinguistic rules of language are often connected with people's view of the world. The dialect that a person speaks reflects their social and cultural world, and as such is a symbol of identity. Early childhood educators need to make concerted efforts to find out about the ways that children are used to interacting at home and accept children's different interaction styles within the setting.

It is important to remember that all dialects are equally valid and functional systems of language. Speakers of dialects other than Standard Australian English do not have 'bad' language, but have successfully learned the language they need to be able to communicate in the environment in which they have grown up. They may need assistance, however, in acquiring the language of the school. This does not mean that they need to drop the language of their home. Children can learn to make decisions about which dialect is appropriate in which situations. In the same way that people are able to speak two languages, it is also possible to speak two dialects. People are able to switch from one dialect to another, according to the people with whom they are interacting.

Linguicism

Despite the fact that there has always been a multiplicity of languages and dialects spoken in Australia, the ideology has been one of monolingualism. Standard Australian English has been considered to be the preferred and superior language and has dominated other languages within Australia. It can be argued that this emphasis on monolingualism, and the dominance of English, is a form of prejudice similar to racism or sexism, known as linguicism.

The term 'linguicism' has been defined as the 'ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups which are defined on the basis of language (that is, of their mother tongue)' (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988, p. 13).

Those in positions of power in Australia are generally people who are monolingual English language speakers. Speakers of the majority language, English, believe that this language should be spoken by everyone. Multilingualism is often seen as being divisive, and therefore not to be encouraged. Speakers of minority languages — in the Australian context, any language other than English — recognise that to achieve in a monolingual society they need to speak the majority language. This results in pressures on individuals to speak English. Many families then, erroneously, believe that the best thing they can do for their children is to speak only English in the home.

In a society that is linguicist, bilingualism is only encouraged to the extent that those who do not have the dominant language as their first language are encouraged to learn it. In Australia, this means that speakers of languages other than English have to become bilingual if they want to be able to participate in the social, political, economic and education systems. It also means that those people who speak a dialect other than Standard Australian English — for example, Aboriginal English — are also excluded from the decision-making process unless they acquire the dominant language.

Community attitudes to linguistic diversity often reflect the view that Standard Australian English is the best, or the only, language. Further than this, diverse languages and dialects are often considered to be inferior. Different dialects of English have generally been viewed by speakers of the dominant language as inadequate for expressing meaning, and the speakers of these languages as having a linguistic deficit. Even the terms used, 'standard' and 'non-standard', give hidden messages about the worth of a dialect and imply a hierarchy of acceptability. The implications are that one is correct and superior while the other is 'bad speech'. Our views about dialects are often ethnocentric — we believe that our way of speaking is the only way or the best way, and that other ways are 'lazy', 'stuck up', 'quaint', 'cute' and so on (Lindfors, 1987).

Speakers of diverse dialects may internalise these views of their language. This may result in them rejecting the language of their family and community, or alternatively hanging on to it even more strongly and rejecting the language of the dominant group.

An Aboriginal teaching assistant, interviewed by Eagleson (Eagleson et al., 1982, p. 240) about the language she uses with her family, highlights the value of the community dialect for maintaining group identity:

> *If you talk, you know, flash, as they call it at home, that's what they think you're trying to be . . . stuck up or something, you know, and you've gotta talk on their level.*

This statement highlights the fact that despite the pressure to speak 'proper' English, many people are able to be bidialectal: to speak the dialect of their family and also the dialect of the mainstream community.

Languages other than English are also often considered by the English-speaking dominant group as inferior and 'deficient'. This was particularly the case in the period of post-war immigration, where the general community attitude was that migrants should be 'like us' and all learn to speak English. Due to the pressure to assimilate, many migrants came to be ashamed to speak the language of their home country.

Many people lost their home language during this assimilationist period. One example is a Hungarian-born woman, now in her forties, who arrived in Australia in the 1960s and attended school in Sydney. She was told that she must speak English in the classroom, had her name changed by the teachers from Anushka to Anne, and was made fun of by the Anglo-Australian children for having salami, olives and large chunks of crusty bread in her lunch box. When she had children, she gave them Anglo names, spoke to them only in English, sent them to school with Vegemite sandwiches made with white sliced bread, and tried very hard to make them feel that they were the same as the Anglo-Australian children. She regrets now that the children do not know Hungarian and will not be able to converse with any of their relatives in Hungary if they go back to visit.

During the 1950s and 1960s, it was believed that speaking a 'foreign' language at home would interfere with the child's ability to learn English. If a child from a language background other than English did not succeed at school, it was considered to be the fault of the child and family, because they did not speak English at home. Children were expected to drop their home culture and language, and to conform to the Anglo-Australian culture and language.

As a result of the emphasis on assimilation, there was a high level of language shift in Australia. Language shift refers to the loss of a community language over a generation. For a variety of reasons, often related to community expectations, and the status and respect accorded to community languages other than English, the second generation of migrants choose not to speak the language of their parents, resulting in language loss.

Aboriginal people, as well as migrants, were under pressure to assimilate European ways and to speak only English. From the time of the European invasion, Aboriginal languages were generally viewed by non-Aborigines as inferior and primitive languages, not able to convey complex thoughts and feelings. Aboriginal languages were thus labelled as 'deficient'. Often Aboriginal communities were forbidden to speak their language by missionaries or government officials, and children were segregated from their families in dormitories and forced to speak only English. Aboriginal communities were often forced off their land and on to reserves or missions, putting pressure on Aboriginal groups to assimilate European ways, including the language.

Due to the pressure to assimilate and the dominance of the English-speaking culture, many Aboriginal languages were lost. A recent study by Walsh (1993) suggests that 160 Aboriginal languages have become extinct since European settlement, 70 are under threat, and only 20 are likely to survive. According to Lo Bianco (1987, p. 34), 'Aboriginal languages die (through death of the last speakers) at a rate of more than one a year.'

Many Aboriginal communities have experienced language shift as the children are increasingly exposed to Western culture through television and radio and as they experience increased mobility. In some communities there are elders who still speak the local Aboriginal language, but there are few younger people interested in speaking the language. Charlie Moran, an Aboriginal elder from Lismore in New South Wales, has been reported as stating that there are only about 20 speakers of Bundjalung left, and they are all old (Jopson, 1994b). His attempts to introduce Bundjalung in local schools have not been successful to date.

However, in other Aboriginal communities the Aboriginal language is still strong. Despite pressures to assimilate, many Aboriginal people and migrants have managed to maintain their culture and language. Often people conformed to mainstream society's expectations on a surface level, but continued to maintain their cultural values and language, even if only in the home. Language and culture are strongly interconnected, and there are often powerful social and emotional reasons for maintaining the home language.

Language and identity

For many people, culture and language are inextricably linked, so that maintaining the language or dialect of the family and community is an integral part of maintaining cultural identity. It is worth noting that for many Australians there is often 'some cultural, emotional or other form of identification and attachment' to a language other than English, although it may not be spoken on a daily basis (Lo Bianco, 1987, p. 14).

Language is learned as part of the socialisation process, and as such we learn the language of our family and community. As children, we learn the language that we need to communicate with others in our speech community and which reflects the understandings that are important within that community. Examples of vocabulary which reflect cultural world-views include the many words for camel in Arabic, and the many terms for snow used by Inuit people of North America. Further to this, most Aboriginal languages have complex kinship terms, as relationships between people are generally considered very important in Aboriginal communities. The Tiwi language spoken on Bathurst and Melville Islands, for example, differentiates between mother's mother *maningawu* and father's mother *amawu*, as well as between younger brother *yuwani* and older brother *yuwuni*. Also, the meaning of the term 'sister' in English usually has a much broader meaning for many Aboriginal people than it does for non-Aboriginal people. Thus, language is very much tied up with our view of the world.

Teaching English to the children of migrants and to Aboriginal children was often used as a means to bring about conformity to Anglo-Australian cultural values. While many families settling in Australia from non-English speaking backgrounds may have conformed to societal expectations, and dropped the language of their homeland because of negative community attitudes, there have also been many families who were able to maintain their home language despite these pressures. For many people, language is such an essential part of their cultural identity that they fight hard to maintain their home language.

Language is a means of maintaining group identity and solidarity and passing on cultural heritage. 'The early bonding and transmission of cultural content is built on first language communication' (Milne & Clarke, 1993, p. 17), as cultural beliefs, values and knowledge are passed on through language. Maintenance of the home language is also a means of remaining in contact with the home country and family members living abroad, as well as promoting a positive self-concept and self-esteem.

For these reasons, many Aboriginal languages are currently in the process of being revived and are being taught to children in schools, often through stories and songs. For example, in the Kempsey area of New South Wales, children are being taught the local Aboriginal language, Gumbaynggirr, through song (Jopson, 1994a). For many Aboriginal communities, reviving the local area's Aboriginal language is a means of maintaining cultural identity and passing on their cultural heritage to their children. Non-Aboriginal Australians are now also beginning to learn Aboriginal languages at school, in consultation with members of the local Aboriginal community. This enables them to gain understandings of the complexity of Aboriginal languages, as well as of the Aboriginal culture of the local area.

The fact that non-Aboriginal Australians are beginning to indicate an interest in learning Aboriginal languages, and that schools are introducing local Aboriginal languages into the curriculum, reflects changes in attitudes towards Aboriginal languages. This is also occurring with community languages other than English, where there is now more support for bilingualism, and more encouragement for those who have English as a first language to learn a second language.

Changing attitudes and policies

In the past there has been little official or unofficial encouragement for people to maintain their home language, or dialect, or for monolingual English-speaking Australians to learn a second language. With changing government policies and community attitudes from the 1970s onwards, bilingualism and multiculturalism have been viewed in a more positive light and community languages other than English have been 'mainstreamed' (Clyne, 1991, p. 220).

The beginnings of the acceptance and valuing of diversity in the 1970s and 1980s extended to linguistic diversity. Interpreters and translators became more readily available in government departments, and bilingualism was regarded as the reality for many Australians. Many monolingual speakers still feared, however, that bilingualism would create 'ghettos' within Australia and argued that everyone who came to Australia had the responsibility to learn English. Government policies to some extent have worked to counteract these fears and assist in promoting the positive aspects of bilingualism.

The recognition of the need for an integrated, overall language policy for Australia, and for language planning, resulted in the development of the National Policy on Languages in the 1980s. This policy (Lo Bianco, 1987), in its general principles, argues that:

- The linguistic pluralism of Australia is a valuable national resource;
- There are many varieties of English which are functional forms of language;
- It is necessary to enhance the competence of all Australians in speaking English;
- Aboriginal languages need to be recognised and steps taken to ensure their survival; and
- Bilingualism is of positive value to individuals and society.

However, although the National Language Policy views bilingualism as positive, there is an emphasis on the economic value of community languages and the need for everyone to be literate in English. There is less emphasis on the sociological reasons for home language maintenance and no real commitment to bilingualism for children under five.

In 1990, Australia ratified the United Nations' International Convention for the Rights of the Child. The rights include the child's right to:

- A name and nationality;
- Respect for his/her cultural and social identity and values and those of others; and
- Enjoy his/her own culture, practise his/her own religion and use his/her own language.

Although Australia is a signatory to this document, again there are few strategies that have been set in place to ensure that young children are provided with opportunities to maintain and develop their home language.

In the 1990s, there has been an increasing emphasis placed on a cross-cultural, anti-bias approach and the inclusion of families in the decision-making processes in early childhood settings. This is reflected in government policies such as the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (1993) for all long day care centres, which includes in its goals the need for interactions between staff, children and families to be characterised by cultural sensitivity and respect for individual diversity. This includes linguistic diversity. However, again there is little support or guidance given to centres to achieve this goal.

The NSW Department of School Education's Multicultural Education Plan 1993–1997 also recognises the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity and the need to implement bilingual programs. However, the emphasis is more on providing support for students learning English as a second language, than on maintaining and developing community languages other than English. Where bilingual programs have been introduced in schools, they are often viewed as transitional, short-term programs, to assist children until they have developed English language skills, rather than as maintenance and development programs.

Early childhood educators need to be aware of existing government policies and current research in the field of linguistic and cultural diversity and to devise strategies that are appropriate for their setting that will enable them to support children's and families' home language maintenance. These strategies need to consider the language or dialect spoken in the home and the experiences with spoken and written language that each child brings to the setting.

Strategies for helping children to maintain their home language

> *Children learning a second language expect, no less than native speakers, that the early childhood programme will be a place where they can continue to communicate with others.* (Clarke, 1992, p. 5)

The rest of this section considers some of the ways in which early childhood educators can provide an environment where children are able to communicate with others in their home language.

- All staff need to make a concerted effort to help the bilingual child to communicate in the early childhood setting. Practical ways of achieving this include learning a few everyday words relevant to the children using the service. Multicultural resource centres generally have booklets that include survival words in relevant community languages that can be used by staff in early childhood settings. Family members should also be consulted regarding the words used for everyday routines such as toileting and sleeping, and the correct pronunciation of these.
- Incorporate bilingual workers in the setting, either on a full-time or part-time basis, and encourage them to use their language with the children. It may not be possible to employ a worker to support the language background of each child in the setting, but when children hear languages other than English being spoken in the setting, they get the message that languages other than English are acceptable, and usually feel more comfortable about speaking their home language.
- Encourage children of the same language background to interact with each other in their home language. Consider language grouping as a form of grouping at particular times during the day — for example, small group experiences and meal times.
- Encourage family and community members to visit the service on a regular basis and share their language and culture with the children. This may involve songs, finger plays, story-telling and so on. It is important to remember that not everyone who speaks a language other than English is literate in that language. It is important not to assume that family

members will necessarily be able to read books in their home language or to translate written materials. It may, however, be appropriate to ask them to tell stories to a group of children or to make an audio-tape of songs or stories.

Invite family and community members to visit your service. Encourage them to share their language and culture with the children

- Provide opportunities for children to be involved in literature experiences in their home language. These may include the sharing of books and told stories, rhymes and finger plays. Clarke (1992) suggests that these types of experiences are important because they reinforce and develop skills in the home language while at the same time building positive self-esteem. Hearing the patterns and structure of stories in their home language assists children later in making sense of literature in English, as they will have developed understandings of narrative structure, especially if they later hear the same story in English. It is therefore important that family members, as well as early childhood educators, are encouraged to read and/or tell stories in their home language to children.
- Incorporate written materials, such as books, posters, food containers, magazines and so on in languages that reflect the languages of the children in the setting. It is important that children are able to see the language that they speak written down, and children should be encouraged to develop literacy skills in their first language.

- Provide families with information that outlines the advantages of bilingualism and the importance of maintaining the first language, particularly when family members are developing English language skills themselves. It is more beneficial for the child if they speak to their children in the language in which they are most fluent. Children need to hear rich language patterns and a range of vocabulary in order to develop language skills. At the same time, it needs to be acknowledged that some families may wish to speak only English at home and their right to do so should be respected.
- Evaluate staff interactions with children and families from diverse backgrounds. Staff attitudes to the language that the child brings from home are of vital importance and convey messages to the child about their worth as a person. Early childhood educators need to ensure that they show respect for the language/s or dialect/s that are spoken by each family in the setting. This means that educators need to be aware of the languages spoken by each family. This is more than knowing that 'they are Asian' or 'they speak Chinese, I think', as it involves precise knowledge of the language/s and dialect/s spoken by the family, the child's experience with this language, literacy experiences in the home and so on. It also includes ensuring that children's and family members' names are pronounced correctly and that the appropriate forms of address are used.
- Demonstrate to each family that their language is valued by including it in the program. This can include ensuring that signs and notes for family members, as well as policies and the setting's philosophy, are translated into relevant community languages. The phone numbers of interpreter and translator services should also be available for families and staff, and interpreters organised whenever possible for family conferences, committee meetings and so on.
- Constantly monitor the attitudes monolingual children, staff and families hold about bilingual children and their language. Staff need to respond quickly to negative attitudes such as *he can't talk*, or *she's dumb*; and to negative behaviour such as *you can't play because you talk like a baby*. Children need to know that these are unfair and hurtful things to say, as well as being untrue. Staff need to point out to the child making the negative comments that in fact this is not the case. You might say, for example, that 'Sabina speaks Italian at home very well and can read books in Italian. She is learning to speak English here at school and is learning it very quickly.'

Bilingualism

What is bilingualism?

There are two types of bilingualism: individual and societal. Bilingualism in a society is said to occur when two or more languages are spoken. In some cases of societal bilingualism, most of the people within a country speak two languages. An example is India, where most people speak an Indian language as well as English. In other cases the dominant group in the society is monolingual, with minority, often oppressed, groups speaking languages other than the mainstream language. This has tended to be the case in Australia, although the situation is gradually changing as bilingual speakers move into positions of power in the mainstream community.

Individual bilingualism is where an individual speaks more than one language. This at first appears to be fairly straightforward, but is not as simple as it seems. There are many different definitions of the term 'bilingualism'. Someone who is bilingual 'knows' two languages, but what does it mean to 'know' a language? Is it speaking a language since birth? Is it being fluent in a language? Is it being able to use a language? Or being able to understand but not necessarily speak a second language?

Some definitions of bilingualism stress competency in both languages as a criterion. A 'true bilingual' is said to be able to function equally well in both languages in all domains: speaking, listening, reading and writing. According to Bloomfield, bilinguals must possess 'native-like control of two or more languages' (1933, p. 56). Many other theorists, however, have rejected this definition as being too narrow and restrictive. It is also difficult to know which native speakers the bilingual is being compared to, as there are many different levels of language proficiency within a community. Definitions that stress competence, particularly when literacy as well as oral language skills are included, face the danger of applying stricter standards to bilingual speakers than they do to monolinguals.

While the earliest definitions of bilingualism focused on competency, more recent definitions have emphasised language use, or function. Mickey (1970, cited in Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981, p. 86) defined bilingualism as 'the alternate use of two or more languages by the same individual'. This definition reflects the move towards language being viewed more as a social phenomenon, rather than just a set of grammatical and linguistic rules. More emphasis is now placed on the functions of language — that is, the ways in which speakers use language in everyday situations. According to functional definitions, to be bilingual is to use two or more languages and make decisions about which language to use according to the situation.

Gibbons (1991, p. 1) suggests a functional approach when she defines bilingualism as being 'the ability to communicate in two or more languages, [without] necessarily imply[ing] competence or fluency'. According to this definition, someone who alternates between two languages can be considered to be bilingual.

Language use depends very much on social context. Bilinguals generally are stronger in one language in certain areas and a second language in others. Speakers tend to use different languages in different contexts and often only know the terms for some concepts in one language. This is known as functional specialisation (Beardsmore, 1986, p. 8).

For example, Nina grew up and went to school in Italy and then studied at university in Australia. She finds that she mostly talks about the subjects she studied at university in English, as she first developed the vocabulary to talk about these ideas in English. She often does not know the Italian for the political and sociological concepts that she learned about in English. On the other hand, she has difficulty translating things from her home experience, such as the foods she eats, for English-speaking friends, as she does not always know the names for these things in English.

How do people become bilingual?

Children and adults can be bilingual from birth or become bilingual later in life. Being bilingual from birth is known as simultaneous bilingualism, as both languages are acquired at the same time. When the child or adult has acquired one language and then learns a second one, this is known as successive bilingualism, as the second language succeeds, or follows, the first.

Many children growing up in Australia will be simultaneous bilinguals. For example, the child's parents may come from two different language backgrounds, and each speaks their own language to the child, the result being that the child learns more than one language at the same time, as is the case for Rosario and Francesca in the case study below. Other examples may be the child who speaks a community language, such as Italian, at home and has been in an English-speaking childcare setting since six months of age, or the young child whose family speaks English, but whose carer speaks to her only in Spanish.

David and Maria live in Melbourne and have a three-year-old daughter, Rosario, and an eight-year-old daughter, Francesca. Maria was born in Spain and speaks only Spanish to the children at home. David is Anglo-Australian and speaks to the children in English. David and Maria speak to each other mostly in English, as Maria's English is stronger than David's Spanish. Occasionally, David will join in a conversation Maria is having with one of the children in Spanish, but sometimes he has difficulty understanding what Maria is saying in Spanish when she speaks quickly.

> Both parents believe that it is important to be consistent in speaking only one language with the children. Maria has always spoken Spanish to the children and insists that they answer her in Spanish. She has sung songs, read books and played tapes to them in Spanish from the time they were born. Francesca is now developing literacy skills in Spanish as well as English.
>
> At times, Francesca has chosen to speak English rather than Spanish at home, particularly when she first started school. Sometimes she is embarrassed when her mother speaks Spanish to her in public and will reply in English. However, Maria has continued to speak to both children in Spanish and expects them to answer in Spanish.
>
> Rosario is stronger in Spanish than English, as she spends more time at home with her mother speaking Spanish than she does with her father. Maria worries that when Rosario starts preschool she will start to lose her Spanish and so is looking for a preschool that has a bilingual program.

This family is a clear example of the one adult/one language policy. This is suggested by many writers on early childhood bilingualism (Harding & Riley, 1986; Arnberg, 1987; Saunders, 1988) as the most useful strategy for children developing two languages from birth, as it helps them to separate the two languages.

Children who have already acquired a firm foundation in the first language before learning a second are known as successive bilinguals. Many children in Australia will start preschool or school with a well-developed first language and very little experience with English. For these children, as well as those who are simultaneous bilinguals, it is important to maintain the home language. The home language is a rich language resource for the children and also assists in the acquisition of a second language.

Often people are afraid that a child learning two languages will confuse the two and that the child will end up not speaking either language properly. Some parents believe that they need to speak only English at home so as not to make it difficult for their child when they go to school. The reality is that a firm foundation in the first language gives children a basis from which to learn a second language.

Individuals can differ markedly in the rate at which they acquire a second language. As successive bilingual learners master a second language, they move through stages of closer and closer approximations to the target language — for example, English. These versions of the target language have been referred to by Selinker (1972) as interlanguages. Often the first language influences the aquisition of the second language. This can be in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary or sentence structure. However, it also needs to be remembered that many of the errors that second language learners make are similar to those of first language learners — for example, overgeneralisations, such as *goed* instead of *went*.

Language mixing may occur in the early stages of second language acquisition for some children, while others are able to differentiate between two or more languages from an early age. Children who are simultaneous bilinguals may spend a longer period of time learning to distinguish between the two languages than a successive bilingual. In both cases, however, children learn to separate the two languages and to use the appropriate language with the appropriate person. This is known as code switching.

How do community attitudes influence bilingualism?

It is also important, when discussing bilingualism, to consider the notions of additive and subtractive bilingualism. Additive bilingualism generally occurs where the ability to function in more than one language is valued by the society and the second language is added to the first. Subtractive bilingualism occurs when the first language is gradually replaced by the second. This is the case for many children in Australia, where the language of the home is not developed and maintained in the early childhood setting.

A study of families from language backgrounds other than English undertaken in the United States by Wong Fillmore (1991) found that early exposure to English in preschool settings resulted in loss of the first language for at least half of the children and negative changes for most children. Parents reported that children who had attended English-speaking preschools tended to speak English at home, even when the parents spoke very little English. Language loss such as this occurs because linguistic and cultural diversity are not valued by the dominant society.

Wong Fillmore (1991, p. 342) suggests that 'minority children encounter strong forces for assimilation as soon as they enter the English-speaking world of the classroom in the society's schools'. She argues that if language minority children want to be accepted in the dominant society, they need to learn English; that these children recognise this from an early age; and that they are therefore highly motivated to learn English. Because of the pressure to assimilate, children often stop using their first language. Consider the situation faced by Fatima in the case study below.

Fatima speaks Arabic at home. Her parents and grandparents speak very little English. She has just started in kindergarten at the local school, where the majority of the children are from English-speaking backgrounds. She does not hear or see her language anywhere within the kindergarten

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classroom. The teacher only speaks English. None of the children in her class speak Arabic, although there are a number of other Arabic-speaking children in the school. She wants to join in the games of the other children in the playground, but often is left out as she does not speak the majority language, English. If she plays with the other Arabic children, it is even harder for her to become part of the group with her English-speaking classmates and they call her names.

The only language that has any recognition and status in the school is English. The language needed to participate in the social life of the school is also English.

How would Fatima be likely to feel in this situation? How might she respond?

The experience of subtractive bilingualism, particularly at an early age, can have negative effects on children's cognitive development as well as their social development and self-esteem. Children may end up not fluent in either language and unable to communicate effectively at home or at school. Breakdown in communication and family values, as well as alienation, can occur at home when the children lose their first language. Subtractive bilingualism often is assimilative, as children reject the language and culture of the home.

As the home language is being replaced with the second language, some children can go through and/or remain in a period of being limited in both languages, which impacts on their ability to learn as well as their ability to communicate. For these children in particular, it is essential to provide support for the development of the first language as well as English. Wong Fillmore (1991) suggests that unless both languages are learned simultaneously from birth, a second language such as English should not be introduced until the child is stable in the first language.

Children who have a firm foundation in the first language are in a much stronger position to develop a second language than children who are still in the process of learning the first language. It is much easier for children to learn new words for familiar concepts than to develop new concepts and language at the same time. If children are not acquiring both languages simultaneously from birth, then it would seem that the best time to add a second language is after the first language skills, preferably including literacy, have been developed. Gibbons (1991, p. 6) suggests that 'one of the worst times to switch language environments is around the age of five or six, when the comparative fragility of the first language does not support the learning of a second'. It is therefore important for early childhood settings to implement programs that support the maintenance and development of the child's first language.

Is bilingualism an advantage or a disadvantage?

Many of the criticisms of bilingualism arise from the belief that bilingualism, particularly childhood bilingualism, has a detrimental effect on development. It is argued by opponents of bilingualism that it impairs intellectual development and results in an inadequate grasp of both languages. Critics of bilingualism believe that the first language interferes with the development of the second language.

Research carried out since the 1960s has challenged many of these beliefs. Peal and Lambert in a study in 1962 (cited in Saunders, 1988, p. 16), for example, found that bilingual French–English speakers in Canada performed better than monolingual speakers on verbal tests of intelligence. They further stated that bilinguals had greater cognitive flexibility and superior concept formation.

Since Peal and Lambert's study, many other researchers have confirmed the advantages of bilingualism. Diaz and Klingler (1991) have reviewed the findings of a number of studies investigating the links between cognitive skills and bilingualism and found that bilinguals have advantages in terms of concept formation, creativity, performance on conservation tasks, visual–spatial reasoning, analogical reasoning and classification skills. Bilingualism is also linked to increased metalinguistic awareness. Vygotsky (1978) also noted that bilinguals are more aware than monolinguals of the arbitrary nature of language and thus potentially more flexible in their thinking.

In summarising this research, Saunders (1988, pp. 24–25) argues that:

> *Most of the problems associated with bilingualism are really social or cultural problems, that is, problems brought about by a hostile or discriminatory attitude of the majority group in society, or sections of it, towards the presence of other languages and cultures . . .*

For many children in Australia the dominant language, English, is their second, and usually, at least on entry to child care or school, the weaker language. Often they are expected to do all of their learning in English, which places them at a disadvantage. Not only are they expected to learn new concepts, but also to learn these in a new language. It is very difficult for children to learn a new language and to develop new understandings at the same time.

Often bilingual children are labelled as slow learners or are perceived to have a language delay, when in fact they do not have the language needed to express themselves in their second language. For example, Rosa, who is a bilingual Spanish–English-speaking preschooler, is identified by her teacher as 'not knowing her colours', when in fact she knows the names of colours in Spanish but not in English.

Bilingual children need assistance in developing concepts in their first language rather than being 'submerged' in an unfamiliar language and expected to sink or swim. Weigt (1985, cited in Saunders, 1988, p. 22) found that Turkish-speaking children in Germany, when provided even with minimal assistance from a Turkish teacher's-aide, showed significant improvements in their understanding of lessons and increased their active participation in classroom discussions.

Ideally, then, in early childhood settings children's home languages should be maintained and developed. A bilingual program enables each child to continue to learn by drawing on his/her total language resources while at the same time learning the English language for already existing concepts. A bilingual program also provides a familiar and supportive environment for each child, where the child receives the message that the language and culture of the home are respected and valued. It also assists in establishing continuity between home and the setting, and lessens the chance of the child becoming alienated from the home environment.

Emilie is four and speaks French and English. Emilie's parents are from New Caledonia, and speak French at home. They make frequent visits back to Noumea to visit family and friends, going home at least once a year for Christmas. Members of both their families also visit them frequently in Sydney, staying for a few weeks or a month. They also have many French-speaking friends in Sydney and socialise with them on a regular basis.

From the time she was born, Emilie's parents spoke to her only in French. She spoke French fluently as a three year-old, when she began to attend preschool two days a week. There were no other French speakers at the preschool and Emilie started to learn English. Often when she spoke English she mixed in French words. Her parents noticed that she started to use English words at home with her French and were worried that she would lose her French.

When Emilie visited Noumea as a four year-old, her grandparents commented that her French wasn't as good as it used to be. Sometimes they would speak to Emilie in French and she would answer them in English. At home, too, her parents have noticed that Emilie is using English more and more. They have commented that she seems to be reluctant to speak French when they are outside the home. For example, if they were visiting friends who were English speakers, Emilie's mother would speak to her in French but Emilie would answer in English.

What should Emilie's parents do? Should they continue to speak to her in French, even though she answers them in English? How can the preschool help with Emilie's first and second language development?

Bilingual learners

How do children learn a second language?

Children learn a second language in much the same way as they learn their first language. In most cases, children will begin with one-word utterances or telegraphic speech which focuses mainly on content words. Generally approximations are made in the early stages, as children develop and test out their hypotheses about language. For most children learning their first language, language is learned in a supportive environment, with many one-to-one interactions and an adult who is 'tuned-in' to what they are trying to say and able to make meaning from their language attempts. Environments for second language learners should, as far as possible, emulate these conditions. Second language learners need an environment that provides them with opportunities for one-to-one interactions with more competent speakers, and a supportive environment where they feel safe to take risks.

The silent period Children learning a new language will usually go through a silent period (Dulay et al., 1982). This will vary in length for each individual child and may subsequently influence their initial productive output. For example, those who have remained silent for longer may appear to have skipped the one-word utterance stage. Staff need to be patient, as the silent period can go on for many months. It is of crucial importance that early childhood staff interact with the child during the silent phase, recognising that at this stage they are a receptive learner. Children still need to communicate, and staff need to be responsive to non-verbal language. At the same time, staff need to model for the child the language that they need to express themselves in their second language. If children can also be supported to express themselves bilingually, then this is even better.

Providing children at the beginning stages of second language development with a language-rich environment is also very important. Opportunities to engage in open-ended experiences, such as sand play and painting, with a small group of peers, enable the bilingual child to hear appropriate language and also to join in with familiar experiences. Early childhood staff need to surround children at this stage with meaningful language — for example, by using many concrete experiences and talking with the child about what is happening.

Social interactions Language develops in a social context. Children learn language while interacting with adults and peers in naturalistic, meaningful contexts. This is true for second language acquisition as much as first. The communicative approach to second language acquisition is particularly relevant to young bilingual learners. With this approach, the emphasis is on learning to use language while interacting with peers, and as Milne and Clarke (1993, p. 67) point out, it 'fits comfortably within a child-centred developmental program in which children want to learn to communicate because it is immediately meaningful and useful to them'. Children are usually highly motivated to communicate their wants and ideas to their peers, to use language to talk about objects in their environment, and to initiate and extend play interactions with peers. It is important that children are provided with ample opportunities to use language in a variety of play contexts throughout the day, as it is through language use that children develop language proficiency.

Ventriglia (1982) suggests that at first children learn a new language receptively, then they actively produce and practise language with peers. According to Ventriglia, the first stage of second language production involves bridging, where children tie words to concepts which are known in the first language. Children often rely on pictures and/or actions to understand the meaning of new words. Learning to label known objects is one of the first ways that children learn a second language. However, it is important to note that children who have remained in the silent period for a longer period of time may skip this stage.

The next stage is chunking. In this stage, there is generally a heavy reliance on fixed formulae and non-verbal communication. Children remember chunks of language they may have heard on television, or language that peers or adults have been heard using, and reproduce it, usually in an appropriate context. Examples may be *no way, it's my turn, how are ya goin'?* and so on. Children remember and use the chunks of language that are meaningful and useful to them in their interactions with peers. Children may repeat the same utterances over and over again in their play. This is very different to the use of teacher drills, where the context is generally meaningless to the child.

In the final stage, children begin to create their own sentences. Eventually, children are able to break the chunks down into parts and use these parts to create new language. Often through the use of chunks, children establish a pattern or rule that they can then use to create new meanings. For example, the chunks *I like apples, I like red, I like to eat* could become *I like to eat red apples*. Children at this stage need to be provided with many opportunities to create language in play contexts, where they are usually more likely to take risks and try out new language than in an adult-directed experience.

During the chunking and creating stages, children are testing out their hypotheses of language. It is important to accept all attempts at speaking the second language that a child makes, and not to correct their language or tell them that they cannot be understood. At the same time, early childhood educators need to be modelling appropriate sentence structure and new vocabulary for the bilingual child.

Extending language skills Children often appear to 'pick up' a second language quickly, and are able to develop sufficient language to interact with peers in a short time. Bilingual children often appear to be fluent in English, and able to maintain a conversation with peers. However, as Gibbons (1991) points out, this 'playground' language is quite different from the language required in the classroom, where higher-level, abstract language is often needed. Cummins (1979) used the terms 'basic interpersonal communication skills' (BICS) and 'cognitive academic language proficiency' (CALP) to distinguish between these two types of language proficiency. BICS includes the skills needed to function in everyday interpersonal contexts. For children this includes the everyday language of conversation, making friends and taking part in playground games. This type of language is generally face to face and includes concrete objects. While BICS is context dependent, CALP is usually context independent, requiring abstract language such as reasoning, hypothesising and classifying. This type of academic language is often required in classroom tasks.

Children usually develop BICS relatively quickly, as they are highly motivated to communicate with peers and can usually rely on contextual clues to help them understand what is being said. In order to develop CALP, bilingual learners require language experiences that are planned to extend on their existing language skills. Adults need to model for these children the types of language and language structures that they are not yet able to produce themselves, particularly the types of language that they will need for more formal, academic learning.

One way to extend these skills requires early childhood educators to observe the functions of language that children are already using and then plan experiences to extend on these. Functions are the things that we do with language — for example, requesting, labelling, predicting, asking for information and so on. We use language to talk about ourselves, have our needs met, talk about what happened, and ask and answer questions. Second language learners often need assistance in broadening the functions of language that they are able to use.

Tough (1976) has outlined functions of language used by preschool-aged children, and these are useful to consider for second language learners. The first function that she identified is self-maintaining language. This is language that is used to assert one's rights, and to make one's needs known to others — for example, *That's mine*. The second function identified is directing language. This is language used to direct or control the actions of others — for example, *Come here* — or more socially acceptable forms such as *Can you* *pass the scissors, please?* Reporting language is language that is used to inform others of what has happened, what is happening now or what may happen in the future. Examples may be *We went to the park*; *I'm building a tower* and *My mum's going to have a baby*. Language can also be used to reason with. This is known as reasoning language. Children may use reasoning language in their attempts to explain what is happening — for example, *The plant is sick because it has no water*. Children also use imaginative language, often in the context of pretend play — for example, *Let's pretend we're the baddies*.

Higher-level functions include predicting, where the child is able to suggest what may happen based on prior experience and logical reasoning. An example may be when putting an ice cube tray in the freezer, predicting that *the water will go hard*. Another higher-level function is projecting, where children are able to project into, or empathise with, the feelings of others. An example might be, *I think he misses his mummy*, when discussing a character in a book.

In the early stages of second language acquisition, bilingual learners generally focus on learning and using language to meet their immediate needs. This generally involves self-maintaining and directing language. Early childhood educators need to help children to further develop these functions, while at the same time assisting children to develop new, more complex functions such as reasoning and predicting. It is these higher-order functions that need to be explicitly included in the program to assist children in developing communicative competence. Adults need to model reporting, reasoning and predicting language for children in a variety of different situations, and to ask questions that encourage second language learners to practise these functions. In this way, bilingual learners can be assisted to develop the CALP necessary to achieve in school learning.

What are the implications for early childhood educators?

Children who are bilingual learners need to be provided with support to continue to develop their first language as well as acquire English as a second language. The rest of this section may assist early childhood educators in planning appropriate experiences for second language learners.

- Remember that new learning is easier if done in the first language. Support children and families in whatever ways are possible to maintain and further develop their home language, both in the early childhood setting and at home.
- Take a positive view of bilingualism and acknowledge the immense linguistic capabilities of bilingual children.

- Children who are second language learners need concrete, hands-on experiences, particularly in the early stages of second language acquisition. Concrete objects are particularly needed if children are not only learning new concepts but also a new language: English.
- Do not pressure children into producing language. Particularly in the beginning stages of second language acquisition, children need to be allowed to remain silent and to use language when they are ready. Provide opportunities for children to practise using language in non-threatening situations, where they are not required to perform for an audience.
- It is essential to provide learning experiences that enable children to utilise all their senses, particularly in the bridging stage. For children in the creating stage, the language experience approach is particularly useful. This approach enables children to be involved in a sensory experience such as cooking, or an excursion, then provides them with opportunities to talk about the experience, to re-visit it through art, drama, music and so on, and then to write or dictate stories related to the experience.
- Literature experiences, as well as songs and rhymes in English, expose children to the sounds and patterns of the new language. Provide bilingual children with opportunities to be involved in individual and small group experiences where they are able to hear the rhythm and flow of English. If children are only hearing short, simple utterances, they are not hearing natural language and are not being provided with appropriate language models.

Organise children into small groups so they become involved in using language to interact and negotiate with their peers

- Opportunities to interact with peers in small group learning experiences assist in second language acquisition. Children learn language best when they are engaged in conversations and in game-like situations. Collaborative small group experiences are beneficial, as children are involved in using language to negotiate with peers, develop hypotheses and solve problems.
- As well as interactions with peers, one-to-one adult–child interactions are of importance. Children learning their first language usually do so in a context where there are many opportunities for one-to-one interactions. As much as possible, this situation needs to be duplicated for second language learners. Bilingual learners need adults who are 'tuned-in' to what they are trying to say and can respond appropriately. Second language learners need adults who are sensitive to their attempts at making meaning.
- Provide learning experiences for second language learners which are meaningful, communicative experiences and not drill. Ensure that children develop language skills that are relevant and meaningful to them and that they have opportunities to practise new language in meaningful, everyday situations.
- Balance the types of experiences provided for bilingual learners so that the amount of language needed by children to participate in the experience varies. For example, provide experiences such as sand and water play, where children can interact alongside their peers without necessarily needing to be able to produce language, as well as more interactive experiences such as a lotto game.
- It is essential to constantly observe the language of bilingual children, in both their first and second languages. Respond to bilingual children's non-verbal and verbal language, expand on their utterances, and model new language structures and vocabulary.
- Bilingual children, like first language learners, are going to make mistakes. This is how they learn. Encourage approximations and expect and accept errors as children develop their understanding of how the new language works. Providing a stress-free environment, where children feel comfortable about taking risks, is important. Encourage children to use whatever language they have to express their meaning. It is important to respond to what children are saying, not to how they say it. Continual correction of errors and high expectations on the part of the adult leads to anxiety, which is a barrier to language acquisition.
- Adult demonstrations (Cambourne & Turbill, 1987, p. 8) of spoken and written language are very important for second language learners. Bilingual learners need to hear language in everyday use, in order to learn

appropriate pronunciation and sentence structure. It is also important to include literacy demonstrations for bilingual learners. Children may be learning about print in their home language, as well as developing understandings about print in English — for example, that it goes from left to right. Demonstrations of the conventions of print are best provided in natural learning contexts, such as the adult scribing the child's narrative, or reading a book and running his/her finger along under the print.

What about monolingual settings?

All children who are in monolingual settings need to be provided with opportunities to increase their awareness and understanding of linguistic diversity. The focus of an anti-bias approach is to foster all children's understandings of diversity and to promote the valuing of diversity. While it is important to develop feelings of positive self-esteem in bilingual children and strategies that assist their learning, an anti-bias approach involves more than this. It focuses on our attitudes towards diversity, ways of challenging stereotypes and resisting bias. For this reason, it is important for all children, families and staff.

Children growing up in a monolingual environment need to be introduced to the reality of the linguistic diversity of their broader community. The concept that there are different ways of talking needs to be consciously introduced to children (Hopson, 1990). If there is no linguistic diversity in the early childhood setting, then we need to bring it in from the surrounding community in whatever ways possible.

A realistic way of introducing linguistic diversity is for staff to use greetings in a variety of languages every day with children. Speakers of community languages other than English, or dialects other than Standard Australian English, can be invited to the setting to tell stories, read books and sing songs in their language. Tapes of songs or children's literature in community languages can also be introduced to the setting. These experiences need to be ongoing to avoid the danger of being merely token efforts at introducing linguistic diversity. By providing a range of experiences in a language or languages other than English, children will have the opportunity to realise there are different ways of talking.

Where possible, it is useful to employ bilingual workers as staff members. All early childhood settings should follow Equal Employment Opportunity principles when employing staff and value the contributions bilingual staff make to a setting. It may not always be realistic in some settings to have full-time bilingual staff members. It is realistic, however, to call upon SUPS (Supplementary Services Workers) staff or casual ethnic staff, as well as family and community members, to support the maintenance and development of the bilingual child's home language and also to help monolingual children appreciate linguistic diversity. Programs that promote bilingualism can encourage monolingual staff, as well as families and children, to learn other languages.

Languages other than English can also be introduced to children through songs and games. There are many commercially available cassettes that can be used with children to introduce songs in a variety of languages. Television programs and videos are also a useful source of linguistic diversity. For example, programs such as *Playschool* regularly feature songs and story-tellers representing Australia's linguistic diversity.

Listening to stories, singing songs and counting in a variety of languages helps monolingual children to understand that English is not the only language, and that there are many different ways of saying and writing things. Providing bilingual books, newspapers, magazines and food packages in community languages other than English for dramatic play and construction, as well as posters and signs in a variety of scripts, illustrates for all children the diversity of languages in their community and gives them the message that all are acceptable in the early childhood setting.

All settings, whether there are bilingual children or not, need to include bilingual books and posters in the resources that are available to children on a daily basis. These resources may be supplemented by others that are borrowed from libraries or multicultural resource centres. This will demonstrate to children that not all print looks the same as that in English. Community walks — for example, around areas such as Marrickville in Sydney or Carlton in Melbourne — are another way to point out the diversity of print. Food packages with print in languages other than English can also be purchased from most supermarkets as well as specialist shops, and introduced into children's dramatic play experiences. Newspapers and magazines in community languages other than English should also be purchased and incorporated into children's play experiences. It is important to always talk with children about these resources, and to point out differences and similarities between languages.

Persona dolls, as outlined by Derman-Sparks and the ABC Task Force (1989) and Hanley in this publication, can also be a useful tool in introducing linguistic diversity into a monolingual setting. A doll who is from a bilingual family can be introduced to the children. This doll could then raise some of the issues related to linguistic diversity that the educator would like to introduce to the children, and maybe teach them some words in the language.

All children's services staff need to be aware of the linguistic diversity within their settings and/or within the broader community and to incorporate this diversity within the everyday planning of the setting. Children from diverse linguistic backgrounds need support in maintaining and further developing their language, and need to receive the message that their home language is respected and valued within the early childhood setting. At the same time, children from monolingual backgrounds need to broaden their understanding of linguistic diversity and begin to accept and value other ways of speaking.

For further thought and discussion

1. What is your attitude to languages and dialects other than Standard Australian English? What attitudes do the staff, families and children in your workplace/practical experience setting hold regarding linguistic diversity? What steps can you take to promote an anti-bias approach?
2. What strategies can be implemented in your setting to encourage bilingualism? What family, staff and/or community resources can you call on?
3. How can the use of Standard Australian English be encouraged in early childhood settings without making children feel that the dialect they speak at home is inferior?
4. Role-play the following situation. Discuss how each of the participants is likely to feel and how you would respond as the early childhood educator.

> Nina and Mario speak Italian at home. Their daughter, Sabrina, has just started to attend the local preschool three days a week. Nina arrives to pick up Sabrina one afternoon and hears Nicoletta, one of the staff, speaking to Sabrina in Italian. Nina is upset about this and goes to speak to the director. She says that she and Mario sent Sabrina to preschool to learn English, not Italian, and they would prefer it if the staff only spoke to Sabrina in English.

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CHAPTER
7

Exploring Families:
The Diversity and the Issues

ELIZABETH DAU

The popular stereotype of the typical family — father, mother and children — was more accurate in the Australia of the 1950s than it is in the 1990s. At that time, the nuclear family was by far the most accepted and most likely family form within the Anglo-Australian majority. There was much greater acceptance that the wife's role was in the home, caring for the children and doing the household tasks. The husband was the 'bread-winner', working for an income. Today, what is typical?

Defining the family

The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines a family as:

> *. . . two or more persons, one of whom is at least 15 years of age, living in the same household who are related by blood, marriage (a registered marriage or social, ie. de facto, marriage relationship), fostering or adoption, and who are usually resident in the same household. (McDonald, 1993, p. 1)*

Most Australians do not define their families in this way, and The National Council for the International Year of the Family, the advisory body to the Australian government on the International Year of the Family, adopted as one of its principles the recognition of the diversity of family life. Their definition of family included:

> *. . . two parents with dependent and older children, sole parent families, step families, blended families, siblings caring for each other, spouse/partners caring for each other, networks of relatives extending well beyond the household, families caring for elderly members and those with a disability, families whose structures and relationships may differ according to race, ethnicity, religious faith and cultural background. (The National Council for the International Year of the Family, 1994, p. 7)*

While the most common form of family remains two parents and children, other forms are varied, sometimes complex and thriving, and this means that we should be moving away from the stereotype that still persists in Western culture — that is, that a family is comprised of a mother, father and children.

So what is a family? Family may mean different things to each of us. Even The National Council for the International Year of the Family in its attempt to be inclusive appears to have excluded same-sex couples, although these may be included under partners. It seems most appropriate that the definition comes from the families themselves. If people see themselves as a family and call themselves a family, then that is what they are. To try and define what is typical ignores the diversity of Australian families in the 1990s.

The diversity of families

Nuclear or traditional families

Although family patterns are changing, the nuclear or traditional family is still the most common form of family. The nuclear family is usually defined as a man and a woman, husband and wife, who live in the same home and have children. You probably know many families that fit the definition of a nuclear family. The 1991 Census of Population and Housing reported 3 666 156 couple families, and of these 52 per cent or 1 629 096 had dependent offspring, dependent offspring being under 15 years of age or aged 15–24 and attending school or a tertiary institution (McDonald, 1993, p. 2).

It is interesting to note that of all couples with dependent children, 6.8 per cent contained step-children. The statistics also show that 'while children may experience a variety of family types, about three-quarters still continue to live most of their childhood with both their natural parents' (McDonald, 1993, p. 2).

Single parent families

This family is becoming more common in Australia. A single parent family can be formed in a number of ways:

- A mother or father living alone, after separation or divorce, with her/his children;
- A pregnant woman who decides to keep her baby but not get married;
- One parent dies and the other parent raises the children;
- A single person adopts a child; or
- A single woman has a child through an IVF program or through a donor and artificial insemination.

> *Sole parent families (620 000 families) are much more likely to be formed following separation, divorce and widowhood than following ex-nuptial birth. About 68 per cent of female headed and 72 per cent of male headed sole parent families were formed following separation or divorce; the death of a spouse preceded sole parenthood for about 11 per cent of female and 14 per cent of male sole parents. About 22 per cent of female and 14 per cent of male sole parents have never been married.(The National Council for the International Year of the Family, 1994, p. 8)*

Stereotypes about single parent families persist. The popular image of single parent families taps into negative attitudes that are based on wrong information. One such popular belief is, 'She got pregnant so she could get the pension.' The figures given above don't support this statement. Another stereotype is that single parents have problem children.

This single woman has adopted two children

Photograph: Cathy Laudenbach

I recall that when I became a single parent, one of my greatest fears related to the disadvantage my children would have — at least I was sure they would, and people confirmed this. I went to the public library and read everything I could find that related to single parent families. I read that we would be disadvantaged financially, which I already knew, but I also read that in relation to school performance my children would not be disadvantaged, nor would they in their relationship with me. The relationship was likely to be different, and it was. It was more a friendship than a mother/child relationship, as we shared in the responsibility for household tasks. It was with a deal of relief that I was able to refute the myths.

Staff in early childhood services need to be supportive of single parents and their children and work actively against the myths that surround these families. Children from these families need to view their family as legitimate and to feel that it is valued.

Step families

The step family is also becoming more common and can be defined as a family in which at least one of the adults is a step-parent. You may also hear this family being called a blended family — that is, where 'family blending' has brought into the family children of either partner from a previous marriage or relationship.

In 1992, 203 000 families contained step-children. This represents 8 per cent of couple families with children and 450 000 dependent and non-dependent children living in step or blended families (The National Council for the International Year of the Family, 1994, p. 8).

It was suggested to me by a student who had recently become a step-mother that step families are not seen as legitimate as the nuclear family and this view, she felt, was held by the staff in the child care centre and school the children attended. I asked her what she thought early childhood services could do to help. 'In order for staff to assist a child to adjust they must first know about the situation and also be supportive and understanding, not only with the child but with all members of the family. In my case this includes biological parents, step-parents, siblings and step-siblings. It is important that staff do not take sides, and it is essential that parents are not criticised in front of children. I'd also like the centre and the school to have books, posters and other things that say that a step family is an OK family.' 'What about Mother's Day and Father's Day?', I asked. 'I think that these celebrations may cause confusion for our children. I'd rather they weren't celebrated.'

Step families need our support. Many step families do achieve family unity and happiness, but unless there is 'recognition and understanding of their problems these families feel different and outside of the acceptable cultural norms' (Conolly, 1983, p. 24).

Gay and lesbian families

We have been hearing more about gay and lesbian families in recent times — for example, many newspaper articles during the International Year of the Family included gay and lesbian families.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics will make a change to their definition of a family before the next survey of families in Australia in 1996. I rang the Bureau and asked if their definition of the family, as used in the last survey, still stood and was informed by a staff member that it did, but that same-sex families would be included in the next survey.

Heated debate continues as to whether same-sex couples can be considered families, and in this debate there is often a display of fierce homophobia.

Whatever the position in the debate taken by people working with young children and their families, they will be faced more and more with the need to acknowledge gay and lesbian families as more are being open about their family form. Lesbian and gay families are not new; they have existed for centuries. But what *is* new is their greater visibility.

While there are currently no statistics on these families, it is often claimed that approximately 10 per cent of the population is gay and lesbian. This means that 10 per cent of the staff and 10 per cent of the parents in our services will be gay and lesbian. Even if some staff cannot approve, 'we who profess to respect young children and to care for humanity must remove our blinders and struggle to grow to accept' (Corbett, 1993, p. 30).

> *Staff may be uncomfortable discussing the subject of homosexuality or being around gay people. That is alright. The goal is for staff to respond to these parents with the same respect they show other parents. (Clay, 1990, p. 32)*

Extended families

Many families still live in an extended family — for example, some families who have migrated to Australia and many Aboriginal families. A definition of an extended family may be a group that has more than two generations living together, or groups of people either living together or separately, though generally in close proximity, who consider themselves a family.

Multicultural diversity

The Australian population includes families from many different ethnic and racial backgrounds. Some families have members born in another country, and others identify, to varying extents, with their parents' country of origin.

The assumption should not be made, though it is often expressed, that people from non-English speaking backgrounds are a homogeneous group. The individual families and communities may have very different needs.

Above all, children need to feel good about their families and to know that they are accepted and valued. 'I cannot think of any way in which it could help children to have respect for their families undermined' (Katz, 1977, p. 95).

A child (three years of age) from a Hindi-speaking background who is hesitant in English is, along with other children, just waking from sleep. A staff member looks at the child and says, 'Can you please put my shoes on?', expecting the child to repeat what she is saying. She repeats this once more, somewhat irritably, but the child looks down at the floor and does not ask her to put her shoes on. 'You know how to say it, you are being lazy.' She puts the shoes in the rubbish bin and says, 'They can stay there until you ask me to put them on.'

What messages is this child receiving? Is this staff member demonstrating that this child is understood and valued?

A small group of children, all newly arrived and from five different countries, and a teacher, are eating their lunches which range from fish and rice to pappadams. All five children are talking in their first language and showing each other their lunches. One child, pointing to the inside of his sandwich, says, 'Veg-e-mite'. All the children repeat it, nodding and laughing as the child presents his sandwich.

Does this story give you the feeling that diversity is valued in this environment?

Kuster (1994, p. 60) talks about professional competencies and a critical competence, she suggests, is 'the ability to perceive and relate to children and families from the perspective of the families' competence'. She suggests one focus on family competence might be the ability to speak a language other than English — so, for example, we might talk about Amelita and her family as a Spanish-speaking family rather than a family from a non-English speaking background, an expression that implies a deficit. Kuster goes on to say, 'Professionals should use expressions that respect and define the capabilities of all children and families.'

Other issues relating to families and children from different cultural backgrounds are addressed elsewhere in this book.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

The size and composition of Aboriginal families isn't important for Aboriginal people; what is important is that the family is a place of nurturing. O'Donoghue (1994, p. 35) provides a broad definition of family:

Extended families are an important structure within Aboriginal society

Photograph: Cathy Laudenbach

> *By family I mean the various arrangements people make to ensure that the young are nurtured and people are looked after. The extended family is very important in Aboriginal society.*

The Aboriginal population also has its own diversity, as groups of people live in different environments and have different languages and customs, developed to meet their particular needs. However, 'despite their diversities, there is a universal bonding among Aboriginal people who share the unique cultural frame of reference known as Aboriginality' (Procter, 1992, p. 92).

The challenge for early childhood professionals is to ensure that the care and education of Aboriginal children reinforces their Aboriginality rather than represses it.

Choices in parenting

One of the choices now available is the fundamental choice of whether or not to have children, a choice available to people because of the advances in medical technology, advances which mean that women who would otherwise not have been able to have children are now able to do so. These reproductive technologies include in vitro fertilisation (or IVF) and AID — artificial insemination by donor, although AID has been practised for many years.

Reproductive technologies are not solely a medical matter, as they raise many social, moral, legal and ethical issues. They force those who work with young children and their families to face some uncomfortable questions about how we feel about these technologies.

The how and why and who of having babies involves political, spiritual, cultural and emotional questions of overwhelming importance. It involves challenges that early childhood professionals must face.

It should, however, go without saying that the decision as to whether or not early childhood staff know that children in their settings have been born as a result of reproductive technologies rests solely with the parent/s. We must be aware that this possibility exists.

The child of an IVF program need not be the only child in the family, and as early childhood professionals we may have to help deal with the difficulties for the other child, or children, as well as providing understanding and support for the parents. There may be difficulties because of the stress that parents are placed under by the demands of the IVF program.

Whether or not we are supporters of the reproductive technologies is not important; what is important is that we recognise our bias, make a conscious effort to support and recognise people's rights to choice, and provide children of IVF programs with the same respect afforded other children.

A mother has complained to Wendy, the director of a childcare centre, that her children were sleeping for too long in the afternoon and consequently were not sleeping at night. One of the boys is four and the other is nearly two, and yes, they both do have long sleeps at the centre.

The comment by another staff member was, 'You'd think that she would be more tolerant of her children, seeing she went to so much trouble to have them.'

I couldn't make much sense of this statement and it must have shown, because it was then explained to me that both children were IVF babies.

How do you feel about the comment made by this staff member? Do you think that as this mother had been involved in an IVF program there might be an expectation that she should therefore be a more than perfect mother?

Valuing families

The early childhood environment

Families are often stereotyped in the books children read, on television, in advertising posters and in many other ways. What is presented to children often reinforces the idea that the nuclear family is the only acceptable family. These images of the stereotyped nuclear family have the potential to 'say' to many children whose families differ from the nuclear family that they, and their family, are not acceptable or are not valued.

Think about how children of a family, other than a nuclear family, might feel if the early childhood service in which they spend many hours has only posters, books and puzzles that show families as a mother, father and children. What messages does this give to children who are not part of a nuclear family?

In the same way, a service might say that this service is for white people only, because that is the only skin colour depicted in posters and other resources.

Staff have a responsibility to ensure that the environment reflects the families in the community in which the service is set and to also reflect the make-up of Australian families. For example, we need to ensure that the environment recognises in a positive way that, while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up only a small percentage (1.6 per cent) of the Australian population, 'they are an essential part of our Australian identity' (The National Council for the International Year of the Family, 1994, p. 1).

Are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families recognised in your service in posters, books, puzzles and in other ways? Do these portrayals reflect these families in their everyday lives?

Staff also need to be aware of the ways in which they respond to children.

The teacher overhears Lucy and Mary arguing in the cubby house.

Lucy (holding a doll wrapped in a blanket): I'm the mother.

Mary: No, I want to be the mother.

Lucy: No, I already am the mother.

Mary: Well, I want to be the mother. Let's have two mothers.

Lucy: Nooo! You can't have two mothers.

Mary: Yes, you can.

Lucy: No, you can't.

Lucy(to the teacher): She can't be the mother.

Mary: Yes, I can. You can have two mothers.

Lucy: NO, you can't.

Teacher: Sometimes families are different, and we have lots of different families in our centre. Michael's family has Grandma and Grandpa, Mummy, Sally and Michael. Anne's family has her Mummy and Daddy and her baby sister, and John's family has his Mummy and his brother. Some families have two mummies, too, and perhaps your family can have two mummies.

The children accept this and the play continues.

This teacher has helped these children to extend their knowledge of families through sensitive intervention in their playing out of roles.

When we talk about families, we must be very careful of our assumptions and our language. In the past we often referred to families as mother and father, but we now know that this isolates children whose family isn't a traditional family of mother and father.

> *Our discussions of family life need to convey plurality and inclusiveness . . . exploratory discussions in staff meetings can enhance thinking and planning for the differences that exist in family structures and circumstances.* (Carter, 1992, p. 8)

Mother's Day and Father's Day

At a recent inservice session where there was group discussion concerning the workload of early childhood staff and the increased pressure put on staff by the accreditation process, one staff member, who works in the babies section, was expounding on how hard accreditation is, how much the staff are expected to do, and how it really is impossible on the one hand and unrealistic on the other. People in the group were nodding in agreement. However, she went on to give weight to her claim by giving an example of what had occurred that very day. She had gone to work in the morning having decided 'no matter what else needs to be done and if nothing else gets done, I am determined to get the Father's Day cards made. Well, here I am at this meeting and guess what? The Father's Day cards are still not done.'

Another member of the group then quietly responded: 'But do you think Father's Day cards would matter to the babies?'

There followed some talk about:

- The appropriateness of Father's Day on the agenda for the babies.
- What it is that causes staff to feel obliged to make Father's Day cards. If it's parent pressure, what do we need to do about it?
- Some ways that we can appropriately acknowledge Father's Day and Mother's Day without making it a crisis in the service.

Some staff said they didn't think to do anything; some wrote a message on the white board, such as ' Have a good day on Sunday!'; some responded with some materials when children asked to make a card (older children); some spoke to fathers if they came in to collect their children. Creaser and Dau (1994, p. 11) suggest that:

> *The choice should come from them (the children) and not be imposed in a way that means that children receive the message that a 'normal' family is one where there is a father and mother at home . . . If for example Helen says, 'My Dad is getting a fishing rod for Father's Day and we're going to the beach for a picnic' it is important to acknowledge with Helen, not the whole group, that this is something celebrated in her home.*

Not only do staff need to consider the diversity of families when deciding whether or not to celebrate Father's Day and Mother's Day, but they need to consider the families themselves. The entire range of human experience can take place in the family, including violence. There is no clear picture of family violence in Australia, but police statistics report that:

> *In a month period in New South Wales and Victoria in 1992, there were over 4,400 calls to the police reporting violence in the home. These figures are high and more alarming since a high proportion of domestic assaults are not reported. (Eastel, 1994, p. 60)*

Parkinson, (1994, p. 59) advises that:

> *Children are often direct victims and can be victims indirectly of the violence occurring between their parents. The effects on children of witnessing and experiencing violence within the family are physically, psychologically, emotionally and cognitively damaging.*

The children in our early childhood services who come from homes where there is love and gentleness may be willing and enthusiastic about making cards for Father's Day or Mother's Day. If a child comes from a home where there is warfare and violence, how does this child feel when asked to celebrate either of these days? Children need *choice* about what they celebrate.

The theme of the family

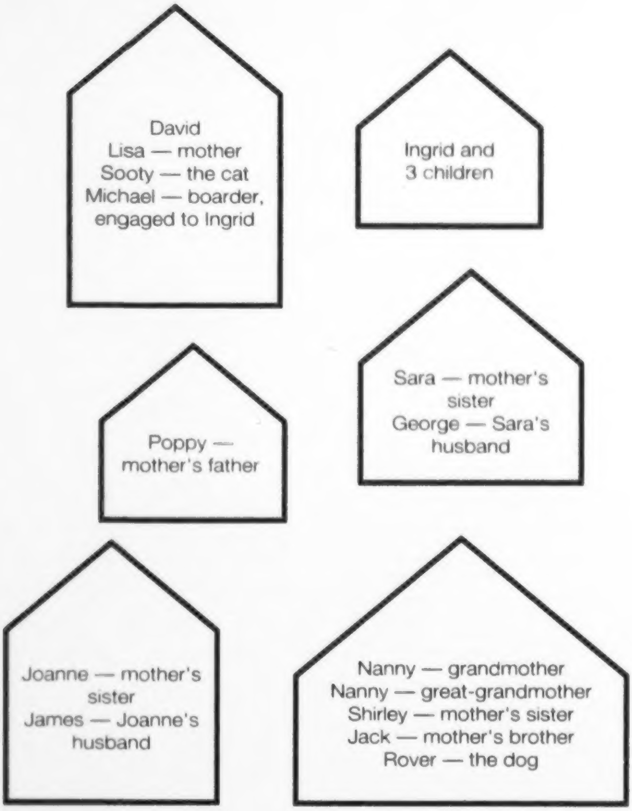
Jones (1989, p. 66) suggests that themes are not necessary in early childhood services, but some thematic planning may enrich the curriculum for children four years of age and older. She goes on to suggest that if teachers decide to plan for themes, there are a number of criteria that should be met. 'Any theme may be selected which is . . . close to the experience of the children in the here-and-now . . . and playable' (p. 67). Using these two of Jones' criteria, the family is an appropriate theme.

We need to be careful that our theme is also the children's theme. The theme that we decide as teachers is not necessarily the choice the children might make. We also need to remember that a 'theme is to *do*, not to talk about' (Jones, 1989, p. 69).

Teachers need to be aware of the complexity of families and family relationships if they introduce the theme of the family to young children. It is important not to make assumptions about children's views of their families, as David's teacher discovered.

David's teacher, Ingrid, lived near David and knew that David's family comprised David and his mother. She was very sensitive to the fact that this family was a single parent family. When she introduced the theme of the family she began by asking, 'Who has two people in their family?' She had deliberately started with two, so that David could respond. She was somewhat surprised when he didn't respond, but she continued. 'Who has three people in their family?', 'Who has four people in their family?' and so on. David finally raised his hand at '12 people'.

Later the children symbolised their family, and David's looked like this:


David
Lisa — mother
Sooty — the cat
Michael — boarder, engaged to Ingrid
Ingrid and 3 children
Sara — mother's sister
George — Sara's husband
Poppy — mother's father
Joanne — mother's sister
James — Joanne's husband
Nanny — grandmother
Nanny — great-grandmother
Shirley — mother's sister
Jack — mother's brother
Rover — the dog

David's view of his family

David's view of his family was very different from that of his teacher. David didn't see himself as different because he was from a single parent household; he didn't view his family as simply his mother and himself. There was, however, an unfortunate outcome from this theme: David now viewed his family as different, and devalued, because no other children had an extended family or pets in their definition. He had also 'learned' that to be a family, you had to have brothers and sisters. All the other children in his class had siblings.

His mother told me the story some time later and commented, 'I thought the outcome of the theme was sad. It was not intended by the teacher, but often teachers don't seem to plan for a particular outcome. They need to think through, very carefully, the outcomes for children and their families. I had a distressed child for some time. We had tears, even tantrums. This was a very difficult time for him.'

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Teachers often do plan for an outcome but often not for a range of outcomes. David could have had several views of what constitutes a family, but the teacher had assumed that he had one view, her view.

The theme of the family can be very complex with many issues to be explored, not only family formation. Teachers need to be thoughtful — for example, about the roles of mothers and fathers — ensuring that stereotypes are challenged. If, for example, the role of mothers is being discussed, is account taken of the differences? Some mothers work at home, some mothers go out to work, an Aboriginal mother may daily take the role of grandmother, aunt, niece, daughter and so on and may be the primary carer for the aged and children of a deceased family member. Cultural factors need to be considered if talking about the roles of family members.

The Code of Ethics

The Australian Early Childhood Association Code of Ethics was developed by a national working party with input from the early childhood field. It was developed 'to inform and guide the decisions and behaviour of all personnel involved both directly and indirectly in the provisions of early childhood services for children between birth and eight years of age' (Stonehouse, 1991, p. 3).

The code has to do with what is important in our work with families and young children and charges us with responsibility to 'acknowledge the uniqueness of each family and the significance of its culture, customs, language and beliefs' (p. 5).

In order to meet this responsibility, staff need accurate information, and not just superficial information, about children's backgrounds, what is involved in their family life, family expectations and family traditions. In order to access this information, staff need to develop positive communication with families.

We need to keep in mind that families may not want to share all information, and we have to respect their right to privacy. However, as a colleague said, 'In the past I would have accepted parents' rights and left it at that. While I still acknowledge families' rights to privacy, now that I am committed to an anti-bias approach, I would tell the parents that the gaps in my knowledge may prevent me from working as effectively with their child as I might otherwise. If parents then decided to share information with me, I would check as to whether it could be shared with other staff or not.'

Accepting the uniqueness of families may cause some stressful times, because it means that we must face biases that we might hold in relation to families. As Funder (1992, p. 2) says, 'A household of adults and dependent children is considered to be the most normal and widely approved in our society, the so-called "nuclear family" . . .', and it is likely that many staff in early childhood services will hold this view. The reality is, however, that there will be families of very different formations also enrolled in services, and these children and families are entitled to the same respect accorded nuclear families.

Conclusion

> *In a diverse and changing world, children need to develop attitudes of respect and curiosity, rather than fear and contempt for human differences (and that includes differences in family structures). They need to develop empathy and shared responsibility — a life long task.* (*Jones, 1989, p. 70*)

People working with young children share in that responsibility.

For further thought and discussion

1. Go back to David's story. How could you help David to understand that families can be made up in many different ways and all are important? Would you have planned differently for the introduction to the theme of the family? What would you have planned?
2. Many early childhood services ask all children to celebrate Mother's Day and Father's Day. The following are stories of the celebration of Father's Day in two services:

> Children were told that they were to make cards for Father's Day and they were to paint a picture of their father on the cards.

How do you think children in this service would feel if their family was them and their mother, or them and their two mothers, and they are asked to paint a picture of their father for Father's Day?

> A store was set up and parents donated a gift. Children were told to bring $2 to purchase a gift for their father. The gifts had been wrapped by parents so the children didn't know what gift they were purchasing.

How do you think children might feel if their family was them and their mother and they are asked to purchase a gift for their father? How do you think children might feel if there was no money for them to purchase a gift for their father? Suggest other ways these services might have acknowledged Father's Day.

3. In the following scenario, the teacher decides that the situation needs to be resolved. Consider the scenario and decide how you would respond.

Three children are playing in the home corner, two girls and a boy.

Christine: I'm the mum and you be the boy baby, Simon.

Jennifer: No! He has to be the Dad.

Christine (to Jennifer): Then you will have to be the baby.

Jennifer: I don't want to be the baby.

Christine: Then Simon HAS to be. We HAVE to have a baby.

Jennifer: OK, Simon can be the baby.

Simon: But we haven't got a dad.

Christine: We don't have to. Let's pretend we don't have a dad.

Simon: But we HAVE TO. EVERYONE has a dad at their house.

Teacher:____________________________________

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CHAPTER
8

Cross-Cultural Challenges in Early Childhood Education

EMIONE (EMMY) KIRIAKOU

Early childhood services in Australia cater for children from diverse backgrounds and are therefore environments which present many cross-cultural challenges. Cross-cultural challenges arise when two cultures intersect, each holding different understandings of an issue or situation.

Cross-cultural challenges in early childhood education can become daunting if they are not examined within the context of an anti-bias curriculum. These challenges can only be acknowledged when practitioners are able to clarify their beliefs about culture and their own cultural identity, as well as that of the children and families with whom they are working.

The recognition of cultural identity does not come from knowledge alone, but from awareness and identification of experiences.

Culture is an indispensable component of the development of the child. The cultural development of a child — that is, the formation of cultural identity — is as vital a factor as the familiar areas of social, emotional, physical and intellectual development. Cultural development in this context may be defined as the acquisition of learned patterns of behaviour that embody an identification with a wider social group and way of life. Culture, in this sense, is a distinct component which entwines with social, emotional, physical and intellectual areas in order for a child to exist in the world.

The family or caregiving arrangements of many children reflect the traditions of their culture.

This chapter will explore cross-cultural challenges in early childhood education, giving examples of instances where cross-cultural communication skills could be employed to ensure quality cross-cultural service delivery.

The challenge of cross-cultural communication

Pauwels (1991, p. 144) defines cross-cultural communication as 'communication that takes place between people whose cultural backgrounds are different in such a way that it affects understanding and communication'.

Communication occurs when both participants have shared common meanings, both verbal and non-verbal, in the communication. These meanings rely upon the interaction being understood and interpreted. If the verbal and non-verbal symbols are not understood, then there is a probability of a breakdown of the communication.

The dynamics of cross-cultural communication can best be understood by considering the involved relationship between language, culture and communication. Practitioners encounter children and families from many different cultures who speak a variety of languages other than English. Practitioners have to discern how communication can occur across cultures when the participants speak different languages. They must be aware that they are participants in this process and not observers who depend upon others for successful communication.

Cultural identity

Pauwels (1991) suggests that the relationship between language and culture often goes unrecognised by language users. This may account to some extent for the misunderstandings in cross-cultural encounters which can lead to strong feelings of cultural superiority or ethnocentrism and reinforce ethnic and cultural stereotyping. Pauwels highlights these difficulties, stating that 'language reflects culture and contributes to a specific cultural view. Language can be the cause of cross-cultural difficulties, can contribute to such difficulties or can signal cultural differences.' (p. 144)

Recognition of the relationship between language, culture and communication could lead to the full utilisation of cross-cultural communication and practice. The acceptance of this relationship may require delving into one's personal beliefs and values. Understanding this relationship will necessitate a recognition of family cultural practices. Cross-cultural communication should be viewed as essential for the implementation of an anti-bias approach to multicultural education.

Pedersen (1988) proposes four types of relationships which involve the interplay of behaviours and expectations in the cross-cultural communication process. Consider the following situation.

> You have discussed with a father, whose first language is not English but who speaks English well, that you would like him to provide a mid-morning snack for his child. You mention specifically that the snack has to be 'good' food. The child arrives the following day with a traditional sweet which is considered a treat by the child's ethnic group. You are upset and annoyed, and the father is puzzled by your reaction.

1. **Type 1 relationships** Participants have similar behaviours and expectations. They agree about expectations and behaviour.

   The practitioner and the parent would have to agree on what is 'good' food for the snack.
2. **Type 2 relationships** Participants have different behaviours but have the same expectations. Both misinterpret each other's behaviour. Pedersen labels this Type 2 as the most common example of multicultural conflict. If the participants can interpret the behaviour accurately, then the relationship might change to a Type 1 relationship.

The father has his view of 'good' food — that is, a special traditional sweet; and the practitioner has a different view — that is, something thought to be healthy, such as fruit. If they discuss the situation, they might come up with options which would satisfy both and the relationship would revert to Type 1.

3. **Type 3 relationships** Participants have the same behaviours but different expectations. Disagreement occurs, as one participant is trusting and friendly whereas the other participant is distrusting and unfriendly. They may both have the same smiling, and pleasant, behaviours. If the participants can understand each other's expectations, then the relationship may change to a Type 2 relationship when expectations are realised.

   The father may take the practitioner's reaction of annoyance and upset as a personal slight. Further discussion would be needed for the parent to realise that the practitioner's idea of 'good' food was different from his.

4. **Type 4 relationships** Relationships are not developed and they end in personal conflict, as both participants cannot recognise each other's expectations nor understand the differing behaviours.

   The practitioner and the father are unable to agree on a snack or snacks that are 'good' from both their points of view. They cease to have discussions. The child continues to bring the traditional sweets and the practitioner continues to be annoyed. There is a total breakdown in communication.

Cross-cultural communication skills

This analysis may provide a useful framework for practitioners in the early childhood education environment, as it clarifies relationships where the practitioners can view themselves as participants.

Consider the following situation. The practitioner has a role to fulfil which is complex, in a situation which requires delicate handling, if there is to be successful cross-cultural communication.

An Italian parent at your centre constantly criticises every activity you present, with the other Italian-speaking parents, as not being traditional, even after having lived in this country since she was a teenager and not having visited Italy since her initial migration some 20 years ago.

What does the practitioner need to know of this parent's cultural background? The practitioner in this situation could examine the behaviour of the Italian parent, and enquire about the expectations of the parent regarding the early childhood program. Does the parent understand culture as being traditional and symbolic and expect these symbols to be interwoven with the curriculum? In this scenario, both participants need cross-cultural awareness.

Program effectiveness may be undermined when families' cultural differences are not taken into account, or when practitioners make assumptions about ethnic characteristics and stereotype behaviours. The effectiveness of programs will depend upon the development of ethnic competence and behavioural change by practitioners. Hanson et al. (1990, p. 126) describe ethnic competence as 'acting in a manner that is congruent with the behaviour and expectations of the members of a particular culture'.

These authors recommend the following strategies to develop ethnic competence:

1. **Clarification of your own values and assumptions** Practitioners reflect upon their own values and do not assume they are common for all people.
2. **Consideration of ethnographic information** This information is about the culture and the community of the child's family. The information describes the ethnic and social characteristics, such as beliefs, the history of the ethnic community and current events. This knowledge may help practitioners to understand how members of the family access and use social services. Identifying the attitudes of the child's cultural community towards help seeking, can be useful in determining the most effective approach to working with children and families.
3. **Determining the degree to which the family operates transculturally into the dominant culture** Some groups may modify their customs and activities to blend into the dominant culture — that is, they assimilate. Others may become bicultural, accepting of both dominant and non-dominant groups. Others may become isolated or separated from the mainstream, forming ethnic enclaves. In all these situations there may be conflict, which can raise barriers to effective early childhood services.
4. **Examination of each family's orientation to specific child-rearing issues** This includes identifying the status of family members. The practitioner identifies the primary caregiver and the family's response to child-rearing issues such as disobedience and aggression.

Consider the following scenario which emphasises the complexity of dealing with diverse cultural views on aggressive and disobedient behaviours.

A Greek bilingual grandfather brings his four-year-old grandson to your centre each day. The child lives with his father and grandparents. This child is constantly 'karate kicking' any child who comes near him. You try to get him to stop, but then he takes to kicking when he is sure he is out of your sight. You approach the grandfather, because you rarely see the father, about the behaviour. He tells you that boys have to be strong and fight and the father has taught the boy how to stand up for himself and 'karate kick'. He dismisses the sneaky, disobedient behaviour with a wave of his hand.

The father and grandfather may have a strong cultural view that the characteristics they are encouraging in the boy are important.

Harry (1992) examines closely the interaction between practitioners and families in relation to child-rearing practices. She raises the issue of practitioners believing in the superiority of democratic child-rearing practices as opposed to more authoritarian strategies, which could cloud their perception of culturally diverse child-rearing practices. She concludes that practitioners should become informed about the disciplinary practices among cultural groups and make judgements on what is acceptable to that group, rather than rely on their professional assumptions.

Consider the following scenario where the family's disciplinary practices may differ from the practitioner's professional view.

An Asian mother and her four-year-old daughter approach your centre's front door. When the child's mother encourages the child to enter, her whimper turns into a loud wail. The mother speaks loudly to the child in a language other than English. She seems to be telling the child not to cry as she gives her a shove through the door. The girl cries quietly and the mother leaves.

This mother's actions may look harsh to an observer. The practitioner might have to accept and respect that in this family the child must obey the parent without question.

The dilemma is deciding how to strike a balance between recognising and respecting the strengths of culturally different traditions, and encouraging families to evaluate the applicability of new strategies that they might introduce to their family functioning style.

Practitioners who are aware that the goals they set for young children are reflective of a particular set of cultural values, and not of some universally valid truth about child-rearing, will be able to acknowledge the legitimacy of the beliefs held by families. One example might be that the collective identity of the family is valued over the individual identities of its members. A second example might be the conflict over the issue of independence.

> An Asian grandmother with limited English comes every lunchtime to 'feed' her grandchild, who stays for two sessions on two days. The parents of the child are happy to have the child eat lunch at the kindergarten, but the grandmother is determined to come each day for 30 minutes to supervise her grandchild's lunch. The child accepts his grandmother's attention without comment or adverse reaction.

The practitioner here is faced with a difficult situation which requires not only an awareness of family functioning style, but also an understanding of the grandmother's expectations of nurturing and care of the child in the early childhood environment.

What are the grandmother's roles/rights? What are some possible staff reactions? What could be the grandmother's reasons for feeding the child?

A key to a positive early childhood education environment rests on practitioners' willingness to examine their professional roles in light of their cultural assumptions.

Multicultural education with an anti-bias focus — implementing cross-cultural communication strategies

There are many definitions of multiculturalism. Foster and Seitz (1990, p. 277) state that they 'range from the descriptive and demographic to the moral and prescriptive'. They concluded that most people are aware that Australia is comprised of many different ethnic groups, but there is dissension about the types of interactions which generate harmony between people in Australian society.

An anti-bias perspective extends multicultural education by addressing issues that include combating prejudice.

> Two children are celebrating birthdays on the same day at your centre — an Aboriginal child, Nura, and a white child, Wendy. Wendy's father is a regular helper at your centre and is a member of the centre's management committee. He communicates well and comfortably with the staff. He is helping at the

centre on this day and is aware that Nura also has a birthday and of the practice of singing 'Happy Birthday' at group time with the children. In a quiet voice he says to you, 'Sing "Happy Birthday" to my child first, not the boong.'

Situations such as the scenario described above cannot be ignored. Clear strategies must be formulated by the practitioner, not only to work out what is to be done immediately, but what is to be done in the future, in order to combat prejudice and racism and to encourage acceptance of cultural diversity by children and parents.

The practitioner should be able to articulate the concerns immediately to the parent, noting that there are policies and that prejudice and racism are unacceptable in an anti-bias early childhood environment. It is the practitioner's responsibility to be well versed in the anti-bias and multicultural policies of the employer.

Arthur et al. (1993, p. 32) discuss diversity, noting that:

> *Each child has their own unique culture, strengths and knowledge based on their own particular family background. It is important that we recognise and value these differences, rather than expect all children to conform to the same standards.*

To value differences, early childhood educators must be aware that their own upbringing is but one of many. This realisation enables them to accept the diverse ways of families in a multicultural society.

Consider the following situation in light of the above:

A four-year-old girl is looking at a picture display of people and houses around the world. She is looking at an African woman with a neck bracelet and says loudly to the passing teacher as she points to the picture and laughs, 'She's weird.'

How might the practitioner respond?

One way of responding may be to focus on the fact that many people wear jewellery but that the jewellery is not always the same. The practitioner could then consider the child's family's attitude to jewellery and how the family's culture influences the child in the home and in the early childhood environment. The practitioner would also need an understanding of the child's home environment, which may influence what the child is saying in this situation.

The following situation requires the practitioner to be aware of many cultural influences — for instance, family functioning style, learning styles and the meaning of child development for ethnic groups.

> Two Chinese-speaking cousins, a boy and girl, attend your kindergarten. The girl child has been observed to have problems with gross motor activities. The boy has no difficulties functioning effectively with materials and his peers in the early childhood setting. You approach the boy's mother (the girl's aunt) who is a fluent English speaker, hoping to enlist her help in discussing her niece's physical delays, but she definitely doesn't want to speak to you about this issue.

This family's perceptions of learning and achievement may vary between its members, and the family functioning style influences the expectations and resultant behaviours towards the special needs of children.

What are the short-term and long-term goals in this situation? What could be the aunt's role in this situation?

The presentation and implementation of a multicultural program utilising cross-cultural strategies and an anti-bias focus is described by Boutte and McCormick (1992) using the following categories:

1. **Building multicultural programs** The premise behind multicultural programs is that people are similar because they have the same basic needs such as water, food, shelter, respect and love. They are different because they attain these needs by different means. They may live in different types of houses and have different diets. Similarities as well as differences should be emphasised in the classroom. The practitioner should be able to highlight the importance of acceptance of all people irrespective of how they look, dress and speak. The practitioner can then introduce various aspects such as religious beliefs, music, art and literature which are representative of many cultures. Multilingual literature which is representative of children from varying ethnic backgrounds and is not stereotypic or a token approach can be a valuable means of illustrating to children the acceptance of cultural diversity. In these ways, cultural diversity can be incorporated within the early childhood curriculum.

   Boutte and McCormick (1992) emphasise that children should learn different words that represent the same thing. This can be achieved by using different greetings or different forms of family names — such as 'Oma' (grandmother) and 'Opa' (grandfather) — in languages which are representative of the early childhood community. Family and community members from varying cultural backgrounds can be used as resource people and be encouraged to participate within the classroom and to be part of the program, such as sharing family traditions.

2. **Showing appreciation of differences** The practitioner's awareness of varying cultural practices can be valuable in interpreting the child's behaviour. The practitioner can gain insight into a child's behaviour by being aware of a wide variety of speech patterns and dialects, and being able to respond positively through verbal and non-verbal cues. Children may be aware of these differences, and if this is negatively reinforced, then low self-esteem and inferiority may result.
3. **Avoiding stereotypes** Practitioners will have their own views of different cultural groups. They need to become aware of their biases as they make an effort to avoid stereotyping other groups of people.
4. **Acknowledging differences in children** The practitioner's recognition of cultural differences can be viewed in a positive way. The acceptance of difference will help to ensure that the practitioner feels more at ease when mentioning different aspects of culture, such as race. Differences should be viewed as assets rather than deficits.
5. **Discovering diversity within the classroom** The practitioner can discover specific details about the children and their families which facilitate the learning and development of the children in the early childhood environment. Boutte and McCormick (1992) suggest home visits, observations of people in public (for instance, when they are shopping), reading about cultural differences, and frequent parent input.
6. **Avoiding pseudomulticulturalism** Pseudomulticulturalism occurs when the practitioner interprets 'multicultural' to mean addressing needs of children from minority groups from different racial, cultural or ethnic backgrounds, but overlooks the needs of the white Anglo-Australian group who may be the majority but are not without culture. The practitioner can meet the needs of all children by expecting them to reach their full potential. Practitioners must acknowledge that no culture is better than any other, just different.

These categories illustrate the complexity of implementing, maintaining and constantly evaluating a multicultural education program that has an anti-bias focus.

Conclusion

Practitioners' understanding of their own and the children's culture is the first step towards a greater comprehension of the importance of cross-cultural communication in the early childhood environment.

The application of cross-cultural communication strategies is important, not only for the practitioner and the child, but also for the child's family.

Practitioners need to recognise and understand the relationship between language, culture and communication, and the challenge it provides for effective cross-cultural practices.

In a multicultural society, practitioners should address these issues in the day-to-day running of their program. They can no longer place these issues in the 'too hard basket', because the cultural diversity of Australian society is a demographic and socioeconomic fact.

Cross-cultural communication focuses on the acceptance of all people, recognises differing family functioning and learning styles, accepts different family behaviours and expectations, and seeks to eradicate misunderstandings of ethnicity and culture. The implementation and maintenance of cross-cultural practices in early childhood settings are important, as they focus upon anti-bias principles which assist practitioners to acknowledge the existence of bias, eradicate stereotypes, combat racism and prejudice, and take action to eliminate discrimination.

For further thought and discussion

1. Compare two different child-rearing practices — the one you experienced as a child and one from a different culture. Consider how families might hold views about what is best for children that are different from your own.
2. List possible methods you could use to affirm children's positive feelings about their own culture.
3. Search for accurate information regarding the daily life experiences of several children from different cultures. How do the children's home experiences fit with those the children might have in early childhood settings?

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CHAPTER 9

'Men should not be asked to play nursemaid to young children': Bias in the Workplace

MARGARET CLYDE

Most early childhood practitioners are committed to providing the best possible service for their clients, young children and their families. As part of their commitment to human services, early childhood staff seek to provide environments which enhance rather than limit the growth and development of the children in their care. Yet it may well be the case that as early childhood practitioners work consciously and purposefully towards providing a bias-free, non-sexist environment for their clients, they are unconsciously continuing a process of prejudice against some adult colleagues — men. Do men belong in early childhood education? Historically, there have been several views.

Male exclusion

> *One could hardly imagine a situation in which a man could be in his element teaching a class of kindergarteners. He would immediately become suspect.*

This statement, made in the 1950s and quoted in Robinson (1981, p. 27), appears to epitomise the attitude of educators to male early childhood staff in North America some four decades ago. Yet this extremely prejudiced statement was not peculiar to the North American scene. While countries like Denmark took a decision in the early 1950s to encourage the admission of male students to the Froebel Training College (Froebel seminariet) in order to try to provide a male father figure for a rapidly increasing number of fatherless preschool age children, the practice was not adopted elsewhere in Europe, North America and in other English-speaking countries. In fact, males in the United States were prohibited from teaching in the early school years and kindergarten. As recently as 1950, early childhood education was not considered the 'right' place for males; Kaplan's 1947 doctoral dissertation from the University of Southern California entitled 'The status and function of men teachers in urban elementary schools' stated quite categorically: 'Men should not be asked to play nursemaid to young children' (Robinson, 1984, p. 27).

It was argued that men should be prohibited from working with young children in any context. However, the subject must have been of some interest among educators; Robinson (1984, p. 27) noted the results of a second doctoral thesis on the topic: Thurman's 1959 study reported that a 'teachers' group in the USA had urged that jobs in the early years of school be closed to men'.

It is curious to note that the founder of the kindergarten, Frederick Froebel, encouraged both men and women to teach young children; he often used the male and female terms 'kindergartner' and 'kindergartnerinner' to describe the teachers in his kindergarten (Sigsgaard, 1987). However, the spread of Froebel's ideas and methods to Great Britain, continental Europe, the United States and Australia did not include the use of male teachers with young children. In fact, the opposite situation prevailed; by the turn of the century, kindergarten work was viewed as the exclusive province of young middle-class women who were perceived as not clever enough to pursue a university course but whose parents were prepared to pay the fees for them to undertake a kindergarten training course. The Sydney Kindergarten Union's Annual Report of 1906–07 argued that the course prepared such young women for life:

> *It is recognised that whether a woman is to be in her home or is to follow a profession, she will have a broader outlook upon life, her sympathies will be deeper and more far reaching and she will withal, be a more useful woman for having had her (kindergarten) training. (Harrison, 1985, p. 25)*

Masculine role models

In the 1960s and early 1970s there was a perceptible change in the direction of the male/female early childhood debate. Protagonists for male involvement in the United States rose to argue with the antagonists about the value of male early childhood workers. Forge et al. (1966, p. 45) stated:

> *Froebel gave women a prominent place in preschool education. Today we could critically consider whether this has been carried to extreme lengths by excluding male personnel from the kindergarten movement. Is this still in the best interests of the child?*

The traditionalists of this era argued for the inclusion of men in early childhood in order to perpetuate traditional (male) sex-role norms. Fearful that a preponderance of women at the early childhood level would 'feminise' boys, they believed that males in early childhood settings would act as 'a panacea for the ills of the feminised world of children' (Robinson, 1984, p. 28). It was argued that men could compensate for the lack of male involvement in some young children's lives, particularly those living in one-parent families (the one parent assumed to be the mother). A male teacher could assist young children's sex-role development by building boys' self-esteem and 'sex-appropriate behaviour' (Seifert, 1988).

This 'compensation hypothesis' is detailed by Greenberg (1977, p. 35):

> *The male teacher has a critical role to play in the education of young children. If he is successful, the male teacher can present many children with an alternate father figure from the one the child might already know — a male who is not violent, distant from children, physically*

> *abusive, or drunk; a male who does not always quarrel with the female adult or yell at other children; a male who can respond warmly and with compassion to the child's demands; a male who is just fun to be around.*

No less than 21 articles appeared in North American journals in the period between 1954 and 1977 in support of this view. The major arguments in favour of permitting men into the early childhood field were the following:

- Their presence prevented children from viewing school as a feminine environment.
- They improved the school performance and classroom atmosphere for boys.
- They counteracted urbanisation and family disintegration problems.
- They provided masculine role models for boys.
- They prevented juvenile delinquency.
- They changed the 'image' of the early childhood profession. (Robinson, 1984)

However, in 1973, researchers Brophy and Good noted the lack of evidence to support this traditional approach. They asserted that the absence or presence of a male teacher made little difference in the school performance or sex typing of young boys.

Androgyny

A contrasting source of support for male inclusion came from significant advances in research on sex roles and androgyny, 'a statement in which both sexes feel free to choose from a full range of human behaviours. Neither sex needs to feel restricted to the behaviour ascribed by socialisation.' (Dean, 1982, p. 248)

Non-traditionalists who appeared on the scene in the late 1970s and early 1980s argued for the inclusion of men as a way of loosening and changing the traditional sex-role norms. They believed that androgynous men offer children of both sexes a model of a caring, nurturant male. 'Males that offer children more than their "masculine presence" . . . should be encouraged to take jobs in early childhood because of the androgynous balance they can provide young children.' (Robinson, 1984, p. 28) Empirical research on androgyny argued that perpetuation of the traditional sex-role behaviours for both men and women seriously restricts their behaviour, particularly in the case of men; that the idea of rigid sex-role differentiation has outlived its usefulness; and that the androgynous person achieves greater psychological health than their sex-typed colleagues because they can engage in whatever behaviour seems most appropriate, regardless of stereotyped sex roles. This argument was translated into the realm of early childhood by suggesting that either a man or a woman could 'prepare snacks for children, soothe a grazed knee, play ball with children or oversee activities at the woodwork bench' (Robinson, 1984, p. 29). Seifert suggested that the androgynous male had a special contribution to make; he would act 'not like a man' but would, by his actions, disprove the concept that men do act in some special 'manly way' (Seifert, n.d.).

Seifert has also mentioned the possible limitations for both traditional and non-traditional arguments: 'In any one child care centre or class', he writes, 'not all children (or their parents) want androgyny, nor do they all want the same particular division of sex roles.' (1988, p. 108)

Gender equity

The late 1980s and the 1990s have witnessed an emphasis on the social equity hypothesis, which espouses the cause of males and females in all jobs. Equity has the potential to increase career options for men (and women) and assist in the steady education of society towards extinguishing the link between early childhood education and 'women's work'. However, on a more practical note, the proponents of the social equity hypothesis have to contend with the 'closed shop' approach of many female early childhood workers who express the concern that an influx of male workers into the early childhood profession could threaten women's jobs in the area. The wheel appears to have turned full circle.

Social attitudes

What are the prevalent attitudes, in society in general and among female early childhood staff in particular, towards men working with young children?

A major dilemma besetting all early childhood staff is the difficulty they experience when endeavouring to argue that their role is a teaching/educational one. Their role, which by virtue of the age and stage of development of the children demands that they must be skilled nurturers and able to make children feel physically comfortable, causes the community to perceive them as nothing more than surrogate parents. This perception is reinforced by various anomalies: children in early childhood settings are called 'children', rather than pupils or students; the activities at the early childhood level reflect home activities, such as cooking, sewing, block building, cleaning up; there are few constraints of time, and children are encouraged to move freely from one activity to another rather than conform to a set schedule which is initiated by the teacher; and early childhood educators cater for the needs of the individual child rather than compare children by the use of group norms, and observe children rather than test them. These are roles traditionally assumed by women as mothers; assuming them is potentially damaging for males who are trying to demonstrate that their role is valuable in our society.

Books for young children provide everyday reminders that working with young children is women's work. Goodhue (1983) determined that such books very rarely portray males as teachers, thus perpetuating the myth of the early childhood practitioner as female.

Nurses, like teachers of young children, have traditionally been women, but men have recently been entering this field. A study of male nurses by Hesselbart (quoted in Gordon & Draper, 1982) indicated that there is probably more than 'free floating negative bias' on the part of female nurses towards male peers. They were described as either work-ethic deviants (that is, lazy) or sex-role deviants (that is, homosexual) by many of their female colleagues.

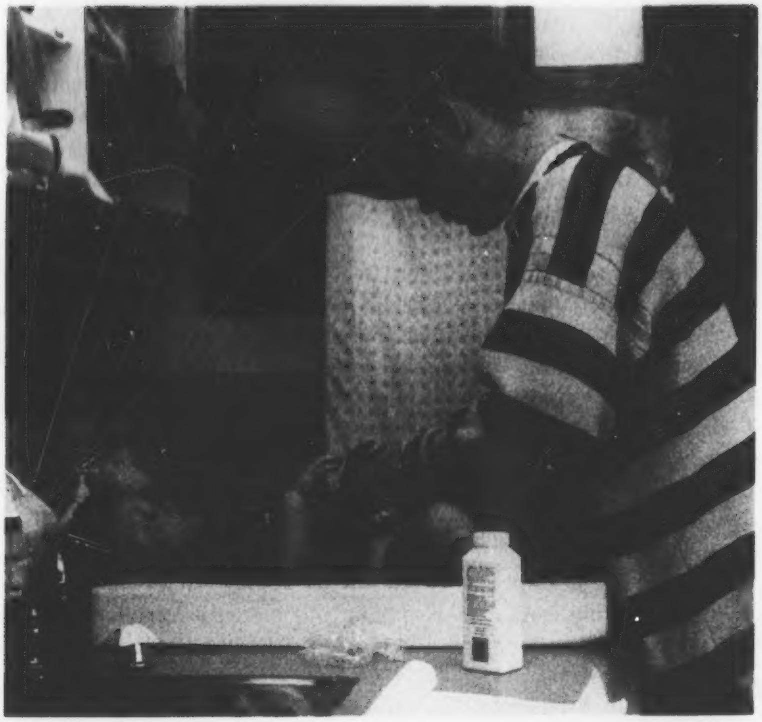
In a survey which requested female nurses to indicate the most serious 'deficiencies' among male and female nurses from a list of nine perceived deficiencies, the respondents were more concerned about laziness and homosexuality among their male counterparts than they were among their female counterparts, and listed criteria from the remaining seven areas to be of more concern among their female colleagues. (The other seven categories were low intelligence, emotional instability, fear of competition, lack of social skills, physical weakness, inability to do other types of work and dependent personality.) From these findings it can be suggested that some females in other female-dominated fields, including early childhood, may perceive their male colleagues as being undesirably different.

A survey by Seifert and Lyons (1976) of Canadian elementary school principals (male) found evidence that school principals believed that a male early childhood worker would have to be someone who was exceptional — just to be there:

> *A man in early childhood would have to be creative, full of life; possess principles and strong values and not care what others thought of him. He'd have to be very sure of himself. (p. 10)*

It would appear that society has attributed a number of myths to the male early childhood practitioner; he is effeminate, he works as a standby parent, and the community does not believe that he should be in the job anyway. What kind of a man would choose to operate under such conditions?

> *Men who work with young children need to feel really male. A gentle, sensitive nature must be coupled with a toughness, a strength of body, mind and spirit. When he feels really male a man can show gentle concern and this too becomes a strength. (Kendall, 1972, p. 360)*



Scenes like this challenge female stereotyping of the nurturing and caregiving role in early childhood services

Attitudes of female early childhood staff to male early childhood staff

Australian research on the ethical concerns of early childhood staff (Clyde, 1990) included a section on ethical concerns related to working with males. Over 90 per cent of the responses (all female) indicated that males should be encouraged to work in the early childhood field; males were seen as making a specific contribution to the early childhood area because they provided a role model for children of female sole parents (21.6 per cent). Other respondents (14.4 per cent) suggested that males have a different outlook on life compared with females, while male strength, character and personality act as a balance and challenge to the female stereotyping of the nurturing role and caregiving role in early childhood services (2.8 per cent). To a question related to whether or not early childhood staff would find the issue of 'sharing the nurturing role with male early childhood staff of some concern, or little or no concern', nearly 7 per cent (of 100 respondents) reported that the issue would be of some concern, whereas over 70 per cent reported little or no concern with this item as an ethical issue.

Respondents suggested the following explanations for the limited number of male staff in the early childhood years: lack of public acceptance (15.2 per cent); lack of pay and promotional opportunities (8.8 per cent); the stigma of male involvement in child abuse (7.2 per cent) and conflict over the 'naturalness' of males performing basic care tasks (7.2 per cent). These concerns were raised by a limited number of respondents when compared to the overwhelming positive attitude (90.8 per cent) towards male involvement in the field.

The relative lack of prejudice towards male colleagues found in this survey contrasts with the findings of an earlier Canadian study (Seifert, 1974). In Seifert's study, female early childhood staff were given identical descriptions of the roles, qualifications and abilities of two mythical kindergarten teachers, George and Linda Smith. They were asked to comment on the qualities needed for success, problems to be encountered, and reasons for choosing to work in the area of early childhood. Results indicated that respondents felt that George and Linda had different reasons for entering the early childhood field, would encounter different problems, and required different conditions for success in the field. While these responses were predictable, one response was not: that George would need less of a friendly rapport with his colleagues than would Linda. Perhaps the respondents were offering the message that they would provide less support for George than they would for Linda?

Seifert's results indicated that the respondents operate on the premises that women, more than men, choose the early childhood profession to facilitate the coordination of work and family life; that men do not require such good rapport with their colleagues; that men are more successful in preschool or the lower primary school grades if they keep moving around (at the expense of concern for the children is the usual implication of this premise); and, finally, that men, more than women, need a 'love of children' to ensure their success. In other words, men have to like children more or, for them, the early childhood profession would not be worth the hassle! In the main, respondents did not expect men to interact sensitively or skilfully with either children or colleagues.

Similar findings were reported in a recent North American survey (Masterson, 1992). Directors in 222 centres in Ohio believed women 'have a natural ability to nurture children and that men failed to have this instinct' (p. 31) and indicated that they would be more likely to hire an untrained woman than an untrained man. Masterson summed up the position succinctly:

> *Whether or not female directors are aware of the negative bias against male early childhood teachers, the survey results suggest they may in*

> *fact hold such attitudes. This could be one of the biggest factors why men find it harder to enter our profession.* (p. 32)

To compare Australian attitudes with these North American findings, a comparable survey was conducted by the author in Victoria. It was designed to find answers to the following questions:

- Are female undergraduate students biased in their attitude towards male early childhood workers when they enter their course?
- Do potential preschool teachers and childcare staff have the same perceptions regarding male colleagues?
- Can the undergraduate program assist female students to alter their attitudes towards male early childhood staff?
- What are the attitudes of practising early childhood professionals towards male colleagues?

A questionnaire was devised consisting of two parts. Part A outlined five normal scenarios in an early childhood setting, namely:

1. The teacher/caregiver is working with children in an outdoor area and notices a child crying.
2. Some of the children are engaged in building an obstacle course and a few are busy in the digging patch.
3. A child is resting quietly in the book corner but obviously would benefit from sitting on an adult's lap looking at a book.
4. John and Pamela are working independently at the carpentry bench. Pamela seems to need some assistance with holding the nails, but John is managing well.
5. The parents are bringing the children into the centre at the beginning of the session and expect to be greeted by the teacher/caregiver.

Respondents were asked to describe how the female 'Mary', male 'Steve' and androgynous 'Chris' would respond in each situation.

In Part B (adapted from Seifert, 1974), respondents were asked to rank seven qualities needed by early childhood workers in the order in which Mary, Steve and Chris would see them as necessary to succeed: problems to be faced by Mary, Steve and Chris; reasons for becoming teachers or caregivers; and, finally, how long they thought Mary, Steve and Chris would work in a centre or in a new job related to young children.

The subjects were 100 female undergraduate students in the first year of an early childhood course, 100 third year students in the final year of the same course, and 22 practising early childhood teachers and caregivers. The poor response from workers in the field (over 300 surveys were sent out) may have been due to lack of interest in the topic or overwork in the centre.

Is our industry biased against male colleagues?

About half the first and third year students indicated that they believed 'Mary', 'Steve' and 'Chris' would react to each situation in the same way. However, the remaining 50 per cent of the respondents suggested that Mary would place the crying child on her lap, whereas Steve would sit 'next to the child'. Chris would ask the child to 'join the rest of the children and learn together', 'do what Mary would do', 'perhaps because he's a male he might ask aloud what the child was crying for first, because women tend to touch more quickly than men', or ask another child to comfort the child. There were many similar examples of the androgynous Chris seeking the support of other children to meet their peers' needs, whereas Steve would assist, direct and tell children at the woodwork bench and digging areas; and Mary would use language to explain or describe and would be most likely to hug, put the child on her lap or touch the child's shoulder.

Responses were consistent across the beginning and exiting cohorts of students. About half had well-conceived ideas of different ways in which male and female early childhood staff would react to identical situations. Mary would touch, encourage, support and sustain; Steve would ask, tell, demonstrate and stand close by; while Chris, depending upon his/her perceived sex, would operate more like Steve or Mary and, in addition, she/he would urge the child's peers to assist.

The responses of the teachers and caregivers, while more sophisticated (the caregivers had an average of 9.5 years' experience and the teachers 12 years' experience), were very similar in terms of the expectations for Mary, Steve and Chris. Mary would 'rush up', comfort, cuddle, offer support, try to raise self-esteem; whereas Steve would observe, check the physical safety and well-being of each child and then, as a last resort, offer advice. Chris was clearly perceived as female by two teachers and as male by two caregivers, and the responses reflected this: 'he would hold things for the children building the obstacle course', or 'she would actively assist in the digging patch'. Three caregivers offered somewhat vitriolic ideas about Chris's possible response — namely, 'he [Chris] is getting a bit bored sitting in the digging patch', 'Chris is not responding — he is thinking of raging tonight', and 'Chris won't do anything for the child in the book corner; he doesn't like reading books to children'.

In Part B of the questionnaire, the majority of students suggested that all three staff would have the same main reason for choosing to be an early childhood practitioner, usually a desire to work with young children. However, there was a significant difference in their perceptions of the amount of time males and females would spend in the early childhood field:

females would spend 'more than five years', whereas males would spend between one and two years or two and five years. Clearly, these students perceived males as transient workers in the early childhood field.

The practising early childhood staff indicated that the main quality Mary would need would be 'a love of children', but for Steve several of the child care staff indicated that a love of children would need to be supported by 'a willingness to discuss professional problems with colleagues'. Apparently the practising caregivers had either experienced working with males or perceived the potential problems a male may have in the early childhood field.

The major problem faced by Mary, Steve and Chris would be 'a lack of opportunity to discuss teaching problems with colleagues' as ascertained by both caregivers and teachers. Obviously, the rigours of the job outweigh any problems related to sex. However, several caregivers noted that Steve and Chris would be concerned about earning a living, whereas this was not seen as a problem for Mary.

Both teachers and caregivers believed that all three subjects chose a job in early childhood because they wanted to work with young children, although several suggested that Steve or Chris desired a 'secure and responsible job'. In terms of the length of time Mary would spend in the centre, most teachers thought longer than five years, whereas caregivers believed two to five years was more realistic. This probably reflects the average length of time practitioners spend in preschools and child care centres respectively. Steve would spend about two to five years in the centre, whereas Chris's length of stay varied on whether she/he was perceived as male or female or worked in preschool or child care.

The final question relating to the length of time Mary, Steve and Chris might spend in a new job varied also: Mary was expected to stay in a job the longest. The following comment from a teacher sums up the situation:

> *One does not find many males working in child care/kindergarten situations. To my way of thinking I don't think Chris or Steve would look for long-term jobs in this field.*

Conclusion

This survey reinforces the work of Seifert (1974) in his North American study and highlights the potential anomalies in the early childhood field. Men are welcome to work in the field, but colleagues who appreciate their presence do so for traditional rather than contemporary reasons. Males are expected to behave differently from females in their handling of day-to-day situations in the centre. Females are sure that, unlike females, males do not see early childhood as a long-term career.

Early childhood is a profession which prides itself on demonstrating a high level of interpersonal skills and establishing a caring, supportive environment for all the participants. If this is the case, it may be possible for males and females to accept the commitment and capacities of their colleagues of both sexes to provide a supportive, nurturing environment for the young child. Hopefully, this androgynous concept of the work of both female and male staff will become the dominant characteristic of the good early childhood practitioner of the next century. However, the somewhat fixed attitudes towards males and male behaviour exhibited by both entering and exiting tertiary students does not bode well for the field. Obviously, it is very difficult to try to change entrenched positions held by young adults who are exposed to judgemental behaviours when working with practitioners in the field whose modelling behaviour probably reflects that of the 22 in-field respondents. There was, however, one respondent who made a plea for males in the field. When responding to the question: How long will Steve actually work in a centre? she responded:

> *Not sure on this! I believe males are discriminated against in child care, unfortunately. So we need more males in the profession.*

Here is a ray of hope; an early childhood practitioner (female) who sees that the way forward to end bias is to encourage greater male participation in the field. There is still a very long way to go.

For further thought and discussion

1. How would you have answered the questions about Mary, Steve and Chris prior to becoming an early childhood practitioner? How would you answer now? Are there any differences in your responses? Why?
2. Is it really appropriate to be an advocate for male early childhood practitioners, or should the field be exempted from equity legislation? Why?
3. If you were the director or coordinator of an early childhood program and a parent accused a male worker on your staff of child abuse, how would you react? Why?
4. How would you respond to a male work experience student who was attached to your centre? Why?

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CHAPTER 10

Persona Dolls

ANA MARIA HANLEY

Good stories speak directly to the imaginations of young children and are a very important way of transmitting values. Stories (oral and written) have been used throughout time, from generation to generation, to pass on information, values, culture, history (family's or country's) and so on.

Few children's books yet depict people from diverse backgrounds or with disabilities living cooperatively and respecting one another, nor are there many books that deal with specific events occurring in children's daily lives.

Story-telling with persona dolls offers a vehicle for extending children's experiences. It opens up a great opportunity to talk about differences, and how to accept and feel comfortable with them. Stories about the dolls are a way of getting children to think and talk about anti-bias issues, issues they may have experienced or observed, or that are new to them. They encourage critical and creative thinking, problem-solving, and a growing awareness of what is fair and unfair in life.

What are persona dolls?

Persona dolls can be useful tools for helping children talk about their own issues

Persona dolls are dolls I use to tell my stories. The story-telling method using persona dolls was developed in the United States by Kay Taus (1989). When I attended my first anti-bias workshop in 1989, her method attracted my interest and attention.

Before coming to Australia, I worked as a child care practitioner at a home for children with emotional and behavioural problems. I did some work with drama and dolls (using techniques from psychodrama and therapeutic play) to help the children talk about some of their issues. I knew that the persona dolls would work for me, so I decided to create some of my own.

The dolls come from different sources. Some are home-made, some (anatomically correct and representing different races) are bought from educational shops, and some are from toy shops. Unfortunately, I have not yet found dolls with disabilities in Australia or somebody willing to make them, but that has not been an obstacle or an excuse for not telling stories about people with disabilities. It just made me think more creatively.

The dolls have their own lives, and those lives to some extent reflect the races and different abilities of the children in the group. The dolls are also a vehicle for introducing differences that do not exist within the group. They are one way of expanding children's awareness of diversity. This is especially important where children, their families and staff come from similar racial and cultural backgrounds and are all physically able.

Simply because you do not have children from different racial backgrounds or children with disabilities in your service, does not mean they do not exist. 'Children are as vulnerable to omissions as they are to inaccuracies and stereotypes. What isn't seen can be as powerful a contributor to attitudes as what is seen.' (Derman-Sparks & the ABC Task Force, 1989, p. 11)

Through the stories, children learn about problem-solving, critical and creative thinking, feelings, assertiveness, how to confront bias and how to take action. Using dolls gives another dimension to the stories. They come 'alive', and the participation in solving the problems in the dolls' lives feels more real.

Having a rich anti-bias environment will help children to ask questions, to raise issues of bias and, with the teacher's help, to learn about differences and similarities and how to feel comfortable with them.

As Virginia Satir says in her book *Making Contact* (1976), we cannot avoid being confronted by differences between people because we are all biologically different. We cannot avoid similarities, because we are biologically similar. Satir goes on to say:

> *Recognising this as a human fact instead of an outcome of hating or loving gives an opportunity to be an explorer with every person we meet . . . The discovery of sameness can provide us with the security of familiarity, and differentness can provide us with excitement and new opportunities to learn and cope creatively.*

Examples of persona dolls

So-Lin is Chinese and four years of age. She speaks Cantonese very well and is learning English. She lives with her mother and father. They have recently arrived from Hong Kong. So-Lin likes dancing and singing very much. So-Lin is the first persona doll I created. I wanted to start talking about racism.

A few times, children had made comments about my Spanish accent and about another person's accent. I wanted the children to begin to understand how hard it is when you arrive in a new country and have to learn so many different things, including a new language.

The doll Samantha is white Australian and is three years old. Samantha lives with her mother and her 12-year-old 'big' brother. She likes dancing and painting. Her best friend is Rachel. I created her to reflect the situation of one of the children in my group, who lived in a single parent family.

Rachel is white Australian and is four years old. Rachel lives with her mother and father and her younger sister Haneka who is two years old. Her mother comes from Holland and her father is Australian. She likes singing and drawing. She was created to help children talk about feelings. We needed a doll to talk specially about feelings towards baby brothers and sisters, as, at that time, one of the children was having difficulties dealing with her feelings towards a younger sibling. It was a great help for that child to find that the doll, Rachel, was feeling the same way. The doll's family background reflected the child's background.

Sipho, who is black South African, is four years old. Sipho lives with his mother and father who are from Soweto. His mother and father both speak English and Zulu fluently. He likes making jokes. What he enjoys the most is making his friends laugh. He was the first boy doll I introduced. His family background, race and personality were a reflection of the characteristics of a child in the centre.

Melina is from Tonga. She is black and is four years old. Melina lives with her mother, father and grandmother. She likes swimming and painting. She 'came to life' after a child from Tonga came to the centre wearing his Tongan clothes. The children asked questions that I couldn't answer at that time. I told the children the dolls had a friend from Tonga at their school. If they wanted, next time one of the dolls came for a visit we could ask them to invite their friend. We could then ask what we wanted to know. When Melina came, she had the answers to our questions. This gave me time to read and learn in general about that culture and to talk to the parents of the Tongan child about how they lived their culture and what was important to them. The information the Tongan family gave me was the reason that I created Melina and included a grandmother in her story.

Each doll becomes a persona doll, with stories to tell, problems to solve and feelings to share. The stories often are left unfinished. By doing this, the children in the group can participate in thinking about the possible solutions to the problems arising in the dolls' lives. Through the stories and the questions the children ask about each persona doll, their lives are gradually revealed in the same way that children's lives unfold when they start to become friends.

The children accept the dolls' stories as real while also realising they are dolls. They know, too, that these dolls are different from the dolls in the home corner. I introduce them as my special friends and keep them in a special place to help them get this idea.

Children ask questions and like to see where I keep the dolls. They ask things like: 'Aren't they cold?', 'Do they sleep there?' I answer them by asking what they think. In this way, they can choose how they want to see the dolls at that particular moment. Their answers vary from 'It's just a doll' or 'They will need a blanket' to 'They are dolls, but they are also pretend people.' Any of the children can play with the dolls. The only rule is that they must ask first and give them back to me when they finish playing. It may sound difficult to do, but after a couple of times it becomes very easy.

One day a child gave me some of Sipho's clothes that he had found in the playground. We went to look for Sipho in his special place and he was not there. I could not remember who had borrowed him. I said, 'I have to look for him', and the child responded, 'He must be cold' (it was a winter day). He ran outside and told the children in his group, 'Sipho is lost, Sipho is lost', and the children decided to look for him. Five minutes later Sipho was found. 'He is OK but he doesn't have his clothes on, not even his pants!', one child said. We all laughed. As they were going back indoors I heard one child say, 'It's just a doll' and another reply, 'I know.' They know that the dolls aren't real, but they also know that what happens to the dolls happens to real people, too. What happens to the dolls can sometimes happen to them.

Through the times spent together, and their lives and feelings shared through my stories, the children become very attached to the dolls.

One group of children decided Sipho should have a birthday and be five years-old like them — after all, they had had their fifth birthday party. So we decided to have Sipho's birthday. They asked me to take him out of the room, so 'he can't hear what we are going to do'. I was surprised and delighted when the children brought presents for Sipho. Apart from the ones they decided to make at school, they also brought special presents they had made at home, or brought one of their toys. I brought a little cake, and the children decided they would blow out the candles and I would open the presents 'because Sipho can't really do that'.

After a story where the dolls Samantha and Rachel did wee in a cubby house, the children decided they needed to be reminded to go to the toilet. That day, the children took turns to take the dolls to the toilet. Why? Because 'It's not fair that other children will get wet with their wee and we don't want them to get in trouble again. We want to help them.'

As I mentioned earlier, I don't have dolls with disabilities, but some of the dolls have best friends with disabilities. The dolls 'told' us about them and gave us the opportunity to talk, learn and explore the issues around different disabilities. Through the dolls' friends we learned how we could speak without making sounds. We learned sign language and started to use it in everyday interactions. We found out how blind people can 'see' and read, and we wrote our names in Braille. We discovered how paralysed people can do things we thought they could not, like making beautiful pictures using their mouth or head instead of their hands. We tried this too, and it became a spontaneously different way of painting. We learned about our differences and similarities and how to feel comfortable with them.

The growing understandings of the children were reflected in acts outside the centre. I witnessed some of them and learned about others through parents. One girl was in her family's car with all the windows up, while her mother was putting petrol in the car. When her mother was about to pay, the child knocked on the window. Instead of rolling the window down, she signed, 'I want a drink', and she got it! Another child went through a sensory track with his eyes closed, holding onto the guide rope and trying to read the signs in Braille. He did not need to, he chose to. As a four-year-old girl said after all our exploring, 'They're not people with disabilities, Ana Maria! They are just people with different abilities!' I have not heard a better definition!

Story sources

The sources of my stories have been:

- Events in children's daily lives;
- Information I want the children to have on issues I want them to think about; and
- World events.

Events in children's daily lives

Children's daily lives are full of events that make great stories — first day at school, a birthday party, a lost pet, using the cubby-house as the toilet, a child hurting little ones, or their best friend telling them, 'I'm not your friend anymore.' Children don't mind if you tell a story that is very similar to something that happened to them, as long as you ask them first. It's very important to respect the child's decision. It is his/her right to say 'yes' or 'no'. If the child says 'no', the story is not told. Until now, no child has refused when I have asked permission to turn their experience into a story.

The stories from the children's daily lives can be used to introduce the dolls and their families, or to talk and solve everyday problems, like the story of Sipho being silly and hurting little ones. There was a five year-old in my group who arrived very early at the centre each morning and with another five year-old was very disruptive, doing all the things they knew not to do and hurting little ones when they ran around inside. I asked the child if I could tell a story about Sipho at group time so that maybe we could offer some suggestions as to what to do instead of running indoors. The child agreed and kept very quiet until we started to generate ideas about the different things that could be done to solve the problem. Then he suggested, 'The teachers could give him a train set to play with.' Every time another child suggested an idea, he added 'and a train set'. The following morning we made sure we gave him a train set to play with. It was a quiet start to the morning!

Information I want the children to have on issues I want them to think about

Discrimination, racial and cultural differences, disabilities and equity issues affect children's lives directly or indirectly. Stories about these issues give the children an opportunity to learn and think about feelings, differences and similarities, fairness and unfairness, and what they can do about it. For teachers, using the persona dolls is a very effective way to find out how children feel about issues. What are their ideas, experiences or biases?

> *Children do not come to our classrooms as 'blank slates' on the topic of diversity — they come with some of their own theories, their own experiences and unfortunately, with the beginning absorption of stereotypes and biases in our society. (Derman-Sparks, 1993, p. 12)*

Having this knowledge about the children will help the teacher to plan appropriate anti-bias activities. I heard a child commenting that a Chinese person had funny eyes. I did a story about So-Lin (the Chinese doll), where she was told by other children that she could not play with them because 'you have funny eyes'. I asked the children what they thought So-Lin could do.

These were some of their answers: 'She cried'; 'She said I don't want to play with you'; 'Go and play with another person'; 'Maybe she went to find someone else'; 'Maybe she turned around and go'; 'Maybe she can go back to China where she's got all her friends.'

After this we talked about the meaning of 'funny' and 'different', of So-Lin's feelings, and again about what she could do. Here are some of the children's answers: 'I'll be her friend'; 'She could say 'Stop doing that or I'll tell the teacher'; 'I have got different eyes from you'; 'She can ask, 'Why are you doing this to me?'; ' 'She can say, 'You can't do that to me because you are hurting my feelings'; 'She can talk to the children about the fact that she is Chinese'; 'She should wipe her tears and try again'; 'Don't say that, it hurts me.'

World events

We may think that events happening in the world do not reach young children. We may be surprised to find that, to the contrary, children, if given the opportunity, can raise issues for discussion, and they can understand things like racism and apartheid.

A child from South Africa was talking with his friends about apartheid (something that had affected his whole family) and about Nelson Mandela. He was very aware of the unfairness of apartheid and its meaning. His friends, though interested, could not grasp the idea. They had no information or experience of it. 'I can play with you if I want', they told him.

I decided to do a story where Sipho, the black South African doll, explained why his parents came to live and study in Australia. After the story, we 'did apartheid'. We used the colour of our eyes and long and short hair to exclude children. We talked about how it affected us, the things we could not do, the friends we could not have and the places we could not go, how we felt, and how fair or unfair it was.

Children gather information about the world in many ways — by listening to adults talk, by watching television, from books, by watching adults' actions and reactions, by talking with their peers and through other experiences. Persona dolls are a vehicle for introducing new experiences in a safe way. It is up to the children how they choose to see the doll and the story — make-believe or real, according to their needs.

This child has chosen to play with one of the persona dolls

Environmental needs

Physical and especially psychological environments are very important. The physical environment for the use of the dolls should be, where possible, a soft quiet area away from transit and noise to minimise interruptions or distractions. It is better to work with children for whom you have primary care. The size of this group should be no more than 8–10 children. The teacher and the children should sit on a mat or cushions in a close circle where they can see each other. At certain times the dolls have to be passed around, as in one of So-Lin's stories where the children had to look at her eyes carefully. Sitting in a circle allows the children to pass the dolls around with the minimum of fuss. This way of sitting also helps to stimulate conversation and the brainstorming of ideas. It helps to create an intimate feeling within the group.

The psychological environment is extremely important and is the teacher's responsibility. Children need a safe and warm environment where they can take risks and make mistakes, an environment where they feel appreciated, valued, supported and loved, irrespective of their behaviour, thoughts or ideas. They have to be able to feel that it is acceptable and safe to risk an opinion without fear of being humiliated. All ideas, all suggestions from the children should be accepted even if they seem unworkable. When children know that their contributions are accepted and valued, they are more prepared to take the risk and will gain confidence in contributing.

The way the teacher behaves strongly influences this environment. She/he must create a non-competitive environment and a warm and intimate feeling, and create an atmosphere of trust, support and friendship within the group.

The ability to make children feel comfortable with what they have to contribute is very important. It is important for the adult to watch, listen and 'feel' what the children want to say. The adults should be honest and, when appropriate, share their feelings, thoughts and experiences and remember always that they are role models. They must 'practise what they preach', and not only at story time.

Persona dolls can be used with a group of children or in a one-to-one situation. This varies according to the reasons for the story. Is the story about a subject that all the children need to explore, or only a particular child? If the latter is the case, how will the child feel more comfortable and safe — with the group, with one or two friends, or just with the teacher?

Using persona dolls

The stories told with the aid of persona dolls can be planned or they can be spontaneous. This depends on the experience and confidence of the person using the dolls. When I began using persona dolls, it was in a well-planned, structured way. I knew in advance what issue we were going to explore. I could choose (from the issues the children raised and those I wanted to raise) issues I felt comfortable dealing with at the time. With time and practice it became easier to make up stories when the need arose.

Problem-solving occurs at all levels of development. In problem-solving, we bring our experience to bear on a new problem. Often, the solution comes because we see a new perspective or angle. Problem-solving situations lend themselves to a range of different solutions. Once the problem is solved, the solution is learned, and the next time it will be used at once (Elkind, 1978).

Problem-solving with persona dolls, within a close-knit group of friends and with a trusted adult, is a very safe way of trying out solutions to problems. If the solutions do not work, no harm is done, as 'real' people are not involved. Through the stories the children and the dolls become friends, and the children sometimes identify strongly with the dolls. 'I do that when I get angry, too!' 'I play the little baby, too!'

Through the dolls, the children begin to express their feelings and to think of better ways of doing this. 'Rachel shouldn't say, 'I don't want to be your friend anymore!' She could say, 'I don't want to play with you right now', instead!' The children learn to think about people's feelings and actions and how they relate to one another. 'I push my sister if she is next to me when I get angry.' They learn that their actions have consequences. 'If you smack her, she will cry. It won't solve the problem.' They learn to expand their perception and to look at an issue not only in terms of their own ideas and feelings. 'Maybe he didn't mean to do that. Maybe he did it because he was angry.' 'Maybe they didn't know she is Chinese.'

Persona dolls become the first practice ground for new skills of negotiation. Through the dolls, children begin to think and talk about different kinds of problems and anti-bias issues, to generate ideas, to evaluate them and to try them out. They learn empathy. They learn to be assertive. They learn to stand up for themselves and for others. They learn how to work together and help each other.

I have found that, when first using persona dolls, few children say anything or give ideas, and when they do make suggestions for solving problems many of the ideas are unworkable. It is very important that when they first express ideas, these are accepted no matter how unrealistic they may sound. This will encourage them to participate and to feel that they are valued and that their ideas are important. Their thinking is important. The children are important.

Taking action

With time, practice and the help of the teacher, children start to use critical thinking and discover, by talking among themselves, which ideas could work and which ones may not. They start by talking to and helping the dolls, and later they try with people what they tried with the dolls. At this stage the teacher should be ready to be the first person the children will choose for their practice. Teachers should encourage, help and praise children for their efforts as much as for their success. Praise must be immediate, honest and specific.

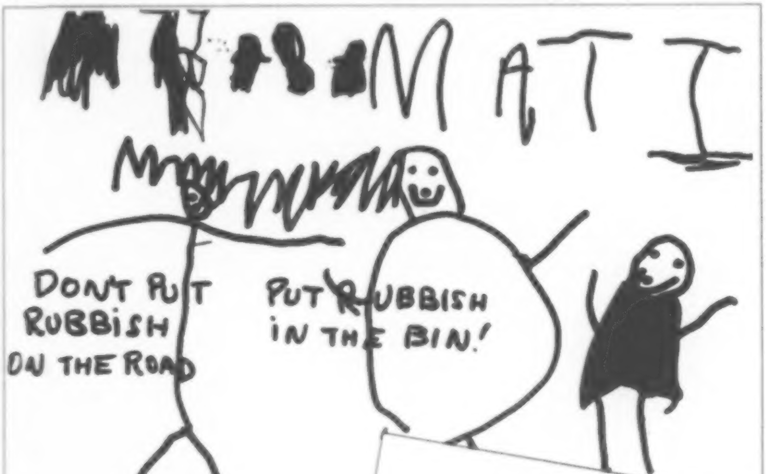
Next, children will start to practise the skills they have learned with the children in their group. Later, when they feel more confident, they will take action with children outside their group and in their daily interactions. They start to think and to discover that they have the power to change things, that if somebody is doing something they do not like they do not have to tolerate it. They can say how they feel and try to take action so that the same unfair treatment will not happen again. 'You don't have to shout, Mum. It hurts my ears', a mother told me her child said to her in a very assertive way. They learn to attack the problem, not the person. 'We have a problem: he doesn't want to play with us.'

Finally, it becomes natural for children to solve their own problems, and to ask for help when they cannot find the solutions by themselves.

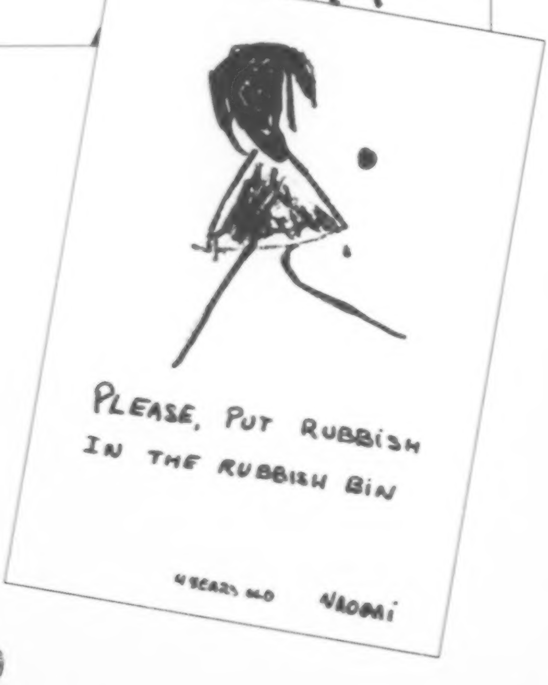
Once, a child was being very disruptive at lunchtime. I tried everything I could think of and some of the child's own ideas, too. Nothing was working. I spoke with the child and asked him if maybe we needed help to solve our problem because we could not find a solution. He said, 'We could talk about it in group time and maybe the children will have some good ideas.' We talked about it at group time. From the ideas offered by the group, the child and I agreed to try two suggestions that we both felt comfortable with. The problem was solved! The ideas — first, I was to ask the child three times to stop being disruptive. If after the third time he did not stop, then I had to 'check' his ears. 'Checking' our ears was a funny way the children and I had of making sure we were listening to each other. Sometimes, before starting group time, we will carefully look at each other's ears (making funny noises) to make sure our ears 'are working'.

The children start to think critically and to take action in other areas, too. One day we were at the park that we frequently used and some children noticed there was rubbish on the ground. I said, 'We won't be able to come anymore, as we could get sick from the rubbish.' A child said, 'I know what we can do. We can tell the people to put the rubbish in the rubbish bin.' That is how our campaign to keep the park clean started.

We checked how many bins were in the park. There were enough bins, so that was not the problem. The problem was that people don't know how to use the rubbish bins. The children spent two days making posters. I wrote on the posters what they wanted to say and had them laminated. Some children were very direct with what they wanted to say, others more poetic, and some added other concerns. Some examples included: 'No rubbish in the park, please'; 'Don't fly up on the sky to get a star and throw it on the ground'; 'Don't put rubbish on the floor!'; and 'Don't cut the trees down!' These were three and four year-olds.


MATI
DON'T PUT RUBBISH ON THE ROAD
PUT RUBBISH IN THE BIN!

1. Don't put rubbish on the road. Put rubbish in the bin!


PLEASE, PUT RUBBISH IN THE RUBBISH BIN
4 YEARS OLD
NAOMI

2. Please, put rubbish in the rubbish bin

When the posters were finished we went back to the park, armed with our posters and masking tape. We put posters everywhere! We put them on the rubbish bins, on the trees and on the poles. The park was next to the centre, so we put some on the centre's walls, too. The children decided to come back next day to check. We found that half the posters had been torn down. After inspecting the damage, the children decided to make more posters and put them up again. We kept replacing them until people tired of taking them down. Other children from the centre were told of what we were doing and joined us. For about a week we kept going to the park to check. Do you want to know what happened? The children's posters stayed until they were faded by the sun and rain, and the park was kept clean!

I believe it is very important that we feel comfortable with the issues we want to explore with the children. I firmly believe I cannot teach these issues unless I am committed to them.

> *Becoming critical thinkers about ourselves, helping each other to identify our anti-bias ways is also very important in this work because we have to practice what we preach. (Derman-Sparks, 1993, p. 22)*

When you work with persona dolls and their stories, you realise that the dolls are a wonderful way of introducing the anti-bias approach to children.

For further thought and discussion

1. Think of a time when a child you know has been treated unfairly by other children. Can you create a persona doll story around that incident?
2. There is more to the persona dolls than just the story-telling. Think of issues that might make stories and then think about what follow-up actions you might encourage children to take.

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CHAPTER
11

Festivals, Holidays and Community Celebrations:

Do They Still Have a Place in Early Childhood Programs?

SALLY BARNES

Festivals, holidays and community celebrations have had a significant role in early childhood programs for many years. Easter, Christmas, Chinese New Year, Hanukkah, National Aboriginal and Islander Week (NAIDOC), and Anzac Day, for example, are special days with significance to particular groups of people in the community in which we work. Many festivals, holidays and community celebrations have been widely promoted and marketed as a valuable resource for teaching young children about cultural diversity.

The celebration of days and events significant to particular cultural groups raises some fundamental questions:

- Are they truly meaningful and relevant to young children?
- Do they teach young children about the real-life differences between people and their daily lives, or do they trivialise cultural diversity?
- Do we learn anything about what children know, or believe, about a group of people by celebrating a holiday, festival or significant event, and do we challenge their developing attitudes towards diversity?

This chapter will examine the role of festivals within the context of an anti-bias curriculum, focusing on the needs of preschool aged children. It will review some of the contemporary opinions surrounding celebrations within a multicultural context and challenge some past and current practices.

This chapter does not set out specifically to advocate the inclusion or removal of festivals, celebrations and holidays from early childhood programs, nor is it designed to demonstrate how to celebrate particular festivals. Instead, it aims to encourage and challenge the reader to rethink and develop their own beliefs about the relevance of these occasions to the children they teach.

The emergence of festivals within a multicultural perspective

As a child of the seventies, I experienced first hand the earliest movements into multicultural education. The home corner in our classroom had a wok and chopsticks, I played with black dolls, and Aboriginal clapping sticks were just one type of musical instrument that my friends and I could use. I dressed in national costume when we learned about a particular culture; I took my Mother's Indonesian doll, which was dressed in traditional clothing, to put on the 'Indonesian table'; I coloured-in stamped maps of countries around the world, learned traditional folk dances, and cooked and tasted many foods that were unusual and different from what I usually ate.

In those early approaches to multicultural education, festivals, holidays and community celebrations were widely promoted as an effective way to teach children about cultural diversity. In fact, they still are (Ebbeck, 1991). Given the large number of resources currently available to early childhood educators, it would be undeniably simple to develop an entire program based on the celebration of festivals.

Various arguments have supported their inclusion in early childhood programs. By recognising significant days, children could appreciate those belonging to specific cultural groups — for example, Chinese New Year, Thanksgiving, Easter and Hanukkah — and develop an awareness that we all have celebrations that are fun to share. A focus on traditional dress, clothing, foods and ceremonies helped to highlight the differences between cultures, blurred at times by the similarities of contemporary living. The specific dates of celebrations made planning and programming for 'multiculturalism' easier (Ramsey, 1987).

Educators also recognised the potential that celebrations had for bringing groups of people together and providing almost unlimited opportunities for families to become involved. Through holiday celebrations such as Easter and Christmas, families were encouraged to share their own cultural experiences of these times, often in the form of traditional foods and games. These occasions and celebrations offered much to those early attempts at developing appropriate and meaningful multicultural programs — they were fun and, for the first time, a real attempt at valuing cultures other than that of the majority.

As a child, I particularly enjoyed celebrating cultural festivals. I can clearly recall holding the head of the Chinese dragon we had made to celebrate Chinese New Year, and the ensuing dragon dance. Festivals were bright and fun — they allowed my friends and me to talk and laugh and share ideas as we worked together to celebrate a day significant to a particular culture, and they incorporated the activities I most enjoyed, such as music, language, cooking and eating, into learning experiences.

As an adult I still love to celebrate festivals, and as an early childhood educator I have done this with the young children I teach. Given the anticipation, planning and excitement that are integral to almost any celebration, I know that young children enjoy them. But is enjoyment alone enough justification on which to base a multicultural program? Katz (1988) cautions that it is not.

Current views

In recent years there has been a move towards developing a curriculum that is at all times inclusive, and which challenges the biases that young children are developing about race, culture, gender, age and people with differing abilities. As educators have begun to question the types and range of experiences that have been offered to young children to teach about cultural diversity, a growing body of doubt surrounding the use of festivals, holidays and community celebrations in early childhood settings has emerged (Ramsey, 1987; Derman-Sparks & the ABC Task Force, 1989; Schurch and Hopson, 1989; York, 1991).

Increasingly, in contemporary opinion, it has been recognised that too often festivals, celebrations and holidays have focused on the exotic differences among cultures, such as food, dress and music, decontextualising people and their cultures and failing to give children information about how people live their daily lives (Derman-Sparks & the ABC Task Force, 1989).

Imagine, for example, if somebody were to base their beliefs about Anglo-Australian culture on the celebration of Christmas. The food, the music and especially the presents, would be great, but would sitting on the knee of an elderly man dressed in a bright red suit, snow, reindeer and hanging socks up on the mantelpiece (if, indeed, you have a mantelpiece) tell anybody anything about what it means to be an Anglo-Australian person? Or would those 'surface aspects' of the celebration express anything about what this group values, how they dress for work and play, what they eat or how they move around the country? By focusing too narrowly on festivals and celebrations, young children cannot learn about the many things we all do on a daily basis in a vast range of culturally diverse ways.

Celebrations may promote the notion that all members of the group share the same attitudes and values about a festival or community celebration. Anglo-Australian people do not all celebrate Christmas in the same way, or even value it in the same way, and we should not assume that Asian-Australians all have the same religious and cultural beliefs about the lunar New Year.

When celebrations are focused upon too narrowly, a 'tourist approach' to planning begins to emerge — visiting the different and then returning to the usual; the usual, most commonly, reflecting the values and attitudes of the dominant culture. Unconsciously, this approach may create stereotypes, rather than challenge them, becoming a token gesture rather than an authentic representation of diversity. For children who live in, or attend programs in homogeneous communities, and who have little opportunity to experience a diversity of lifestyles and life experiences, there is the added danger that such a focus could damage their developing sense of self and others.

Consider the following situation.

You are working in a child care centre where almost all the children have an Anglo-Australian heritage. You decide to celebrate Aboriginal and Islander week to teach the children about Aboriginal culture. You do dot paintings on bark, invite Aboriginal people from the local college to come and teach the children some dances, put pictures on the walls of Aboriginal people looking for bush tucker, and you paint the children's faces with paint they have made from crushed ochre.

What will these experiences alone teach the children in your service? Do they give the children any information about how Aboriginal Australians live a contemporary life — for example, that Aboriginal children go to school, drive in cars and may occasionally eat at Hungry Jack's?

Do these experiences allow children to draw a comparison between this week that is significant to Aboriginal people and the daily lives of this particular cultural group? If not, and if there are no Aboriginal families currently using your service, how will you present this valuable information to the children in your care so that they can begin to develop a balanced and accurate view of contemporary Aboriginal lifestyles?

There are other issues that engulf holidays, festivals and celebrations as effective tools for teaching about cultural diversity — for example, how do we give equal weighting to the festivals and celebrations of all cultures? Do we only value the festivals that are important to the children and families who use our services, or do we present every festival we can think of and therefore be both inclusive and equitable? How do we, as early childhood educators, tackle the growing commercialism that surrounds both Easter and Christmas? Do we celebrate, or do we, as is increasingly occurring, ignore these occasions? How do we meet the needs of the families who, for many reasons, do not want to be included in the celebration, and how do we tackle these issues while maintaining a respect for the values of all the families who use our services (Neugebauer, 1990)?

Good early childhood programs are supportive environments that are based on individual interests and needs. These programs challenge children and allow them to take risks, and they give individuals the opportunity to build on their existing levels of skills, knowledge and attitudes to develop higher and more abstract levels of understanding (Wardle, 1990; Creaser & Dau, 1994). It is with great difficulty, then, that celebrations and festivals can be developed within such a framework.

Many of the concepts which enshroud the celebration of a particular event are complex and abstract. Carter and Patterson (in Ramsey, 1987) believe that young children do not understand particular conventions which underpin culture until they are at least eight or nine years of age. This means that concepts such as 'Japanese' or 'Greek' are meaningless to very young children with whom we are working. And yet, knowing for whom the day or event is significant, forms the critical foundation upon which celebrations are based, and is the number one reason most often stated for their inclusion within the curriculum.

What about the rituals and symbols which are related to festivals, such as the animals significant to Chinese New Year? Ramsey (1987, p. 79) suggests that these have little meaning without knowledge of the daily life of a particular cultural group and, as a result, 'children are apt to remember only the exotic differences that were portrayed as part of the holiday, rather than the fact that real individuals with whom they may share many similarities celebrate a particular day'. Without these symbols and rituals, the 'visible aspects' of the celebration, we are left in a dilemma. If we believe that young children learn best from concrete, 'hands-on' experiences, but know that those that we are presenting have little relevance, what aspects of the celebration do we focus upon?

What about the types of activities that we associate as 'holiday activities', such as face painting, music, dancing and cooking? Children's participation in these activities does not provide evidence that children have learned anything about culture or race. A child can beat a drum as a Chinese dragon dance begins, but this does not indicate that the attitudes and values surrounding race and culture which the child has already developed have been extended, challenged or changed. What, then, do we use as the foundation upon which we base our curriculum, and how do we evaluate and extend what we are presenting?

Consider the following situation.

> You are a teacher of four-year-old children, and conscious of developing a program that values cultural diversity. You decide, in February, to celebrate Chinese New Year.

Where will you start? What experiences will you present to celebrate this occasion? How will you explain to the children the meaning of the event?

After you have celebrated Chinese New Year with the children, how will you evaluate the experience? You know the children have enjoyed themselves, but what have they learned?

How will you extend this program, and what will form the basis of your extension?

Giving festivals, holidays and community celebrations a place in early childhood programs

The extent of contemporary opinion leaves little doubt that many of the concepts integrally related to the celebration of festivals and holidays are not meaningful to young children. As an educator, I have personally battled through many of these issues as I have attempted to create an environment for children that is both inclusive and meaningful. Increasingly, I have avoided celebrating almost any festival or holiday with the children I teach, but I do not believe that this is the answer.

Derman-Sparks and the ABC Task Force (1989) suggest that we don't need to acknowledge festivals, holidays and community celebrations, because they exist as part of our society's cultural life. However, if we fail to recognise festivals we deny the fact that national holidays and festivals do affect all people regardless of their religious beliefs, personal values and social attitudes. The normal activity of daily life is suspended when public holidays are declared at Easter, Christmas, Anzac Day and on the Queen's Birthday. Denying holidays and other days which are significant to particular cultural groups not only removes the rights of children and families to the identity related to celebrating that particular occasion, but also denies children who do not recognise these occasions the right to learn about them (Ramsey, 1987).

So am I convinced that there is no longer a place for celebrations in early childhood programs? Actually, no.

First, when educators recognise days that are special to particular cultural groups, we can share with the children the desire to understand different values and life experiences. What teachers believe about, and how they respond to, differences and similarities among people gives children powerful messages about what is valued in our society and what is not. When teachers omit a particular concept from their program, they suggest to children that it is not really important. Celebrations say, 'Learning about people is important. This is the way some people do things. Let's find out about this together.' This is one of the most important messages that we can give to young children.

Secondly, holidays and festivals provide educators with one of the most concrete ways to tackle ethnocentrism. They are a meaningful way to help children learn that not all groups approach holidays, particularly national holidays, with the same feeling as those in the majority. As a result, celebrations provide one of the most salient opportunities for directly tackling issues of prejudice, omission and ethnocentrism with young children. Early childhood educators can help children to explore the difficulties that some of their peers who are, for example, Jehovah's Witnesses may experience when Easter and Christmas are celebrated in the early childhood service, or to look at the values that conflict between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians during Australia Day celebrations.

Festivals, holidays and community celebrations still provide one of the best opportunities to involve families in the program. For the past two years, I have worked in a preschool that provides services to a community with many Vietnamese families. Celebrating the lunar New Year is an important occasion — parents, many of whom speak little English, come to the centre to cook with all the children; there are important links made between staff and families through the shared festivities; and all the children are given the message that this is a special time for some of the children and that these are important events for everyone to acknowledge.

What should we do about Christmas?

Over the past six years, as I have explored anti-bias issues, there has been one issue in particular that I have not been able to resolve. Christmas celebrations, I believe, are one of the most difficult dilemmas facing those committed to an anti-bias approach to education. There are a number of reasons why. First, the timing of the celebration. In Australia, Christmas occurs at the end of the year and the beginning of the summer season. For schoolchildren it marks the end of one year and the transition to the next. Christmas time marks the beginning of summer holidays — schools, preschools and many child care centres close for an annual break, many businesses close for the holidays, and there is a general feeling of 'winding down'. End-of-year celebrations, therefore, are invariably tied to Christmas.

There is heavy pressure to celebrate Christmas with young children, and it is a festival which is very heavily targeted to a young market. The colours are bright, there is music and dancing, foods that children adore, and presents. Making the decision to avoid the celebration is an extremely difficult one, because there is pressure from everywhere to join in — from children, parents, other educators, the community, advertisers and so on.

As an educator I am yet to say 'no' to celebrating Christmas. In part, I know that I still lack the courage to tackle the complex issues that will emerge if I refuse to celebrate the event. But I also have to admit that I enjoy the challenge of creating a meaningful celebration for all the children and families with whom I work, and I truly enjoy coming together at the end of the year with everyone to celebrate and to share good wishes for the coming year. I'm not sure that there isn't a place in the curriculum for Christmas, but I believe that how it is celebrated is what is important. Drowning the curriculum in everything red and green and bell, candle and holly shapes is not an appropriate way to celebrate Christmas with young children.

Educators must avoid the growing commercialism. Father Christmas does not belong in preschools or childcare centres. (The concept of Father Christmas is appealing to some children because he is not seen and yet leaves surprises.) Focusing on concepts such as giving, caring and sharing is far more beneficial to young children and helps to link the commonalities that exist between all cultures.

Conclusion

There is no simple answer to the question of whether or not to include or exclude festivals, holidays and community celebrations from early childhood programs. Early childhood educators need individually and collectively to clarify the issues themselves, to create a curriculum that challenges and tackles bias with children. Most importantly, educators must think not only about why they are celebrating a particular occasion, but also how. Only with such an approach will the curriculum and environment be truly appropriate and meaningful for young children.

For further thought and discussion

1. Which celebrations have most significance for you? Which do you think you could include in the program that you offer children? Why would you include them?
2. If you decide not to celebrate Christmas, how will you explain this to families? Remember, many parents, including those from the majority culture, have values and attitudes that are tied to the celebration. How will you take their views into account?
3. Where will you get your information about cultural celebrations? How can you ensure that this information is accurate?
4. How will you ensure that there is a balance between images of people celebrating and images of them within the context of their daily lives?

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CHAPTER
12

Empowering Adults — A Personal Experience

VERONICA JOHNS

Raise your head, look at me.

It was not easy as a child, nor as an adult. Over the years I've found it a little easier to do, but I still find this uncomfortable.

Facing new challenges

We all have to face new challenges and adapt ourselves to various situations. Writing this chapter is one such challenge. To face new challenges we have to have a little bit of understanding and knowledge about ourselves, and we have to have a little bit of understanding and knowledge about the situations in which we are putting ourselves. The way we do this, face new challenges and adapt to situations, is through our senses. To quote from *Wangami* (1988), 'Senses are openings to the world.' *Wangami* talks about how, through our senses, we become part of the world around us, and how the world around us becomes part of us. We look, listen, touch, taste, smell and move in and out of experiences, learning as we go.

Through my story I hope you will come to understand that it helps to look at yourself, listen to others, to open yourself to touch, to be moved into action and be hungry to taste and want more.

I am an Aboriginal person born and raised in Darwin in the Northern Territory. Twelve of my childhood years were spent in a children's institution with many other Aboriginal children. I was taken there at nearly three years of age. I went there with two brothers and a sister. The sister was taken to another place soon after. I was still very young, but I can remember being so upset when she left.

Until I enrolled in a child care course when I was 28 years old, I had never thought of myself as an Aborigine. I hadn't considered my Aboriginality. Today I know of my Aboriginality and I am proud to say I am Aboriginal. I could not have done this unless I had exposed myself, my thoughts and my feelings, to my family, my friends and my colleagues. I will write about this and how it contributed to my personal and professional development. I write with the aim of encouraging people to work more effectively with other adults, especially those from disempowered groups in the community.

Growing up in the 'home'

The 'home' had eight cottages, set out like a horseshoe with the superintendent's house in the middle, at the opening of the 'horseshoe'. Each cottage housed 10 to 13 children. My brothers and I grew up in Ashmore Cottage, otherwise known as number three cottage. I devoted myself to my brothers and today I still find it very hard to let go. I don't know why I was in the 'home', and I guess I may never know. I was quite content with the other children, playing and exploring and, on occasions, attempting to 'buck' the system.

Some of what I remember about my life in the 'home' includes:

- *Travelling around in a cattle truck* — this was a 'shame job', especially going to school, as the other children used to tease us.
- *Going out with my mum to where she lived* — I remember the car, the house, the kittens, and the chooks and ducks, but I don't remember my mum or any other people. I think these visits happened in the early years, as I remember it was many years later before we saw Mum again.
- *Being afraid of being adopted out* — families outside the 'home' would take children out for weekends. I went out to families, and this was okay, but I was afraid of being adopted out as this would mean leaving my brothers.
- *Going on camps* — the 'home' had places where we went in the school holidays. These were great times as we had a lot more freedom, and we didn't have a two-metre fence around us. In these times we learned from the older children about looking for animal tracks, and how to make their tracks. We learned about the various animal calls and how to find foods from the bush.
- *Reuniting with my sister and my family* — I knew I had a sister named Beverley, who had had to go away. Years later, when I was about 12 years old, we met again. This became a significant time in our lives. My brothers and I got to meet our mum again, and also got to meet out grandparents, cousins, nephews, nieces, aunties and uncles, as well as 10 other brothers and sisters we didn't know we had. For many years I had wondered where my mother was and if she was alive. (We did go to stay with her on weekends in the early days.)
- *Cottage parents* — in our cottage we had about six lots of cottage parents during the time I was there. These 'parents' were either single women or married couples who came from 'down south'.
- *The 'kids' in our cottage* — they were from across the Territory and from the Kimberleys. We formed bonds that made it very hard for 'new kids' to fit in, and we also tested the new cottage parents. As in any family, we had fun times and times of fighting.

After leaving the 'home'

At the age of 15 I left the 'home' and went to live with my uncle and auntie. I found this quite different and difficult, adjusting to a lifestyle that didn't have such stringent limits. At 16 I was living with my boyfriend, and at 17 I was a mother. I was content with my life and secure with my family.

Discovering my Aboriginality

When I was 28 years old, I enrolled in a two-year child care course. Three situations caused me to consider first my Aboriginality and then my upbringing. First was acknowledging that I was an Aboriginal person on my enrolment form. I felt really uncomfortable about this. How could I be an Aboriginal person? I thought I had to be dark skinned. (I ticked I was Aboriginal anyway.)

Secondly, I looked at Aboriginal families in the second-year multicultural unit. We talked about Aboriginal children who were displaced from their families and put into institutions and missions. As I had never thought deeply about my own experience, I found this very difficult and emotional — to the point where, on one occasion, I had to walk out of a film we were watching. I also felt that people were now looking at me differently.

Thirdly, I had the opportunity to attend an Aboriginal early childhood conference with Aboriginal people from all over Australia. The purpose of the conference was to put together a national policy on education for young Aboriginal children. I had never been with a group so focused on, and who believed so strongly in, the need for Aboriginal children to have specific programs and that these be provided in specific ways.

I heard here of the diverse upbringings of Aboriginal families and of children who had grown up in institutions just like me, but in other States. I heard of traumas that many had been exposed to and were still coming to terms with. I had never heard Aboriginal people speaking so openly, and with such emotion. I could feel myself crumbling as I watched and listened and wept with one of the speakers.

I was faced for the first time with looking at myself, really looking deep into me and what made me up.

It was scary.
I thought I knew me.
I was a mother, a wife, a sister, an auntie, a friend . . .
I felt OK about me
I 'knew' me, others 'knew' me.
It was comfortable, it was safe.

Now, all of a sudden, I didn't 'know' me; others also didn't 'know' me. I know now and understand that there are people all over the world, far, far away and so close, who have felt the same, and may still feel the same and may never 'know' themselves.

I returned to Darwin in a 'mess', with the thought that I could not continue with the course but would have to spend time finding out about my family and my roots and also coming to terms with being 'brought up' away from my family. I had rehearsed my speech to the course coordinator, letting her know that I wouldn't be able to continue. To my benefit, with two months remaining to complete the course, she wouldn't accept this; and so, with her support and belief in me, I went on to complete my studies. I thank her for this.

Finding out about myself meant telling my husband, my family and friends about how I was feeling. I began to feel that I must be Aboriginal, although some others said I wasn't. I had a hard time trying to work through this and I felt sometimes that those close to me weren't being a support to me, or that they couldn't accept or understand what I was saying. I was telling an older person from the 'home' one day about how I felt coming back from the conference, and also of the difficult time I was having, particularly at home in trying to work myself out. She gave me some valuable advice. She told me to be patient with them, and to continue letting them know how I was feeling, as they would most likely be feeling confused and unsure and having a difficult time of it also.

After having a heated discussion about my Aboriginality one day, and feeling quite upset about it, I wrote the following poem:

The Right To Be Who I Want To Be

Is it wrong of me to be what I want to be?
Is it right for you to tell me what to be?
Do I have a choice?
You can't be all of that
Because you have a bit of this
It is not possible to be that
How can I put into a single word
Who I am!
Is this fair?
But you force me to choose
Don't you! So I do not have the freedom of choice
I DO NOT HAVE THE RIGHT!
If I don't have the right
Who does?
YOU?
How did you get it?
Where can I apply to get it?

I wanted to say I was Aboriginal. My mother's family are Aboriginal. I didn't know about my father's family, but I thought he was 'white'. If I said I was Aboriginal, did that really mean that I was disregarding my father's family? I didn't think I was making that statement. I certainly didn't want to say that. I wanted to say that I was more than an Australian.

Returning to my roots

The following year, after completing the child care course, I travelled to the Kimberleys in Western Australia for the first time, with my mother's sister and my two youngest children, to fill in some of the large gaps in our family tree. I wrote the following words to describe how I felt about the trip 'West'.

I saw it
I heard it
It was my language
My country
The land of my mother's people
My family
And my Aboriginality.
I went looking for myself, that part of me deep within.
I found myself there. I felt that I truly belonged and existed.

Reflecting

Reflecting on where I am today, I am proud of the commitment I made to myself to study, and to learn about myself. I am pleased that I had people who were patient with me, listened to me and sometimes questioned what I was saying or feeling. This gave me time to sort things out, and to question myself. It was helpful to receive advice and encouragement from others, and direction to other supports. It was helpful to have people to talk to, and to be with people who understood what I was feeling and going through.

I believe that all of us need to feel that we belong. We need to have a sense of pride in who we are, and to feel that we have meaning in our lives. We must all be able to look at ourselves and to know ourselves, and we must allow others to get to know us.

I am proud of my Aboriginality. I understand that I was born into a time when the people who made decisions did not understand or use their senses to open themselves to learn and understand about Aboriginal people, their lifestyles and their values.

My message is: have some understanding and knowledge, and know the people around you; become a part of your world and a part of others' worlds.

For each and every one of us needs to be, and to be connected.

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CHAPTER
13

Parent and Family Focus:
An Essential Ingredient

ANNE
STONEHOUSE

A parent brings a child in most mornings without breakfast. Nappies are often left behind at home, and the parent is usually running late and very rushed. Is your attitude towards this situation and the way you respond affected at all by knowing that this parent is a single parent? What about if you're told the parent is a sole father?

A parent requests that her child not be given any meat or meat products. Is your attitude towards this situation and the way you respond affected at all if this request emanates from a religious belief, as opposed to being simply an individual preference?

A young child suddenly starts behaving in ways that are distressing and destructive to staff and other children — biting, snatching and refusing to co-operate. Is your reaction altered by knowing that she comes from a two-professional, high-income family?

A parent typically brings his child dressed in expensive clothes, and shows annoyance if the child has dirtied them when he picks him up at the end of the day. Is your response affected by the fact that this father is from a non-English speaking background?

A child attends your program very irregularly, sometimes missing days at a time with no explanation and no prior notice. Is the way you deal with this situation affected by the fact that the child is from an Aboriginal family?

The question that could follow each of these situations is: should it be? And the best answer in all cases is probably 'yes and no'. There are no right answers to these questions, but they hint at the complexity of issues that early childhood professionals deal with on a daily basis, and point out the need to exercise considered professional judgement in our work with other people's children. They also hint at the fact that latent or acknowledged biases and generalisations can easily creep into our judgements and affect our interactions with families with whom we work.

Understanding and acceptance of differences and the reasons for differences, acknowledgement of the fundamental sameness of all people, appreciation of the primacy of parents in their child's life, and respect for all human beings are at the heart of appropriate relationships with parents in early childhood programs.

An anti-bias perspective focuses on people

An anti-bias perspective focuses on people, not cultures. It involves not just 'doing' differences — different foods, different clothes, different music, different celebrations — which often has the effect of satisfying curiosity and the desire for amusement, but goes little way towards engendering feelings of goodwill and comfort with difference. An anti-bias perspective looks behind differences with the aim of understanding why. Explanations can often come from looking at the context in which a family operates. Some families demonstrate caring and valuing of their children through purchasing educational toys, while others do it through dressing their children in fine, expensive clothes. Some families encourage experimentation and messy play by their children as a means of helping them to develop and learn, while others to the same end place much more emphasis on structured 'school' learning and lessons at a very early age. These examples demonstrate that beneath and behind the many substantial difference in families, in people, are fundamental similarities: we all eat, we all wear clothing, we all sleep, we all need shelter, we all need security and love, and mostly we all try to rear our children in the best way we know how. Most differences grow out of the ways we devise to meet our common needs and goals.

When an anti-bias perspective is adopted, people are seen as people first, and not primarily as Aborigines, Vietnamese, Aussies, Down Syndrome, lesbians, single parents, or whatever categories or labels we might devise.

Maintaining a partnership with parents and families

Most people who work with other people's children, if they are being honest, will confess that one of the most challenging parts of their job is establishing and maintaining a partnership with the parents and families of children. Any early childhood professional who says that 'the staff and families are all one big happy family here', that there are no tensions and conflicts, is not looking carefully at what is happening. Tension and conflicts are inevitable, as they are in any meaningful relationship. They are not necessarily destructive, but on the contrary can lead to growth and stronger relationships if they are resolved in a positive way. What makes the difference is how they are dealt with. Reasons for conflicts and tensions are many and varied, including the following salient ones:

- The relatively low status of early childhood professionals;
- Lack of appropriate preparation and support for this complex task;
- Confusion on the part of both parents and professionals about the nature of the desired relationship;
- Ambiguity about the appropriate roles of parents and early childhood professionals;
- High stakes — that is, the child's well-being; and
- The ease with which attachment by an early childhood professional to a child can lead to a critical stance towards and competitiveness with the parent.

In addition, quite often when the roles of and relationships between early childhood professionals and parents are discussed, terms such as participation, involvement and management take centre stage. While these are important, they are means to an end, part of a process, rather than being at the heart of the issue. The heart of the issue is about spirit, attitude, respect, complementarity, lack of competitiveness, common goals and understanding.

The importance of partnerships in a good-quality program

The term 'partnership' is fairly commonly used to describe the relationship that should exist between parents and early childhood professionals. What does it mean? This type of partnership shares characteristics of a partnership in business or in personal relationships, which are as follows:

- Mutual respect;
- Trust;
- Sensitivity to the perspective of the other;
- Ongoing open 'both ways' communication;
- Common goals that are clear and agreed on (the child's well-being);
- Teamwork, absence of rivalry or competition;
- Equality, fairly equal distribution of power;
- Recognition and valuing of the unique contribution and strengths of the partner; and
- Shared decision-making.

Many people who work with other people's children will also say that forging partnerships with parents of the children they work with is one of the most rewarding parts of their job when it happens successfully, and one of the most important. After all, if we want to make a positive difference in a child's life, and one that is lasting, we need to influence the child's parents.

Add the dimensions of cultural diversity and other categories of difference, and an already complex set of challenges becomes even more complex. This being so, however, it is still the case that all the principles and practices that apply to partnerships with parents in general apply to families that are somehow labelled as different, because, after all, each family is different, as is each individual.

The reasons that a partnership lies at the heart of the provision of good-quality early childhood programs can be summed up as follows (Stonehouse, 1991, p. 22):

- The family is the most significant influence on a child's development and well-being; consequently, working well with a child means working with the family and nurturing a strong parent–child relationship.

- Continuity between home and care is vital for a young child to develop and learn well.
- When parents and staff do not share information about the child, each is relating to the child without the whole picture, and each may have different assumptions without realising it.
- The contributions parents can make to all aspects of the program are many and varied. Rather than being an extra task or burden, partnership with parents brings many rewards and benefits, not the least of which is that informed parents are likely to become strong advocates for the centre and for quality care.

A partnership will be different with each family, as some will want to be more involved with the operation of the program than others, some will actively seek out more information and will volunteer more information, some will be friendlier, more confident, and some will be more protective of their privacy. *There is no one formula for the perfect partnership.* Avoid promoting a single notion of the ideal parent or the ideal model of parent–staff partnership.

Adopting an anti-bias perspective starts with examining yourself, looking at those parents and families that you find most comfortable to relate to, and those that you do not. Which families do you consider ideal, and why? What categories of differences bother you the most? Which 'types' of parents and families are you the least comfortable with, or which do you perceive as being the most difficult to work with? It is easier to accept differences in children than in adults, perhaps in part because we see them as being more malleable, more able to change; whereas adults may be seen as more entrenched in their attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. Acknowledging your own prejudices is the first step towards changing them. We all have prejudices, and we all tend to over-generalise about categories of people. These prejudices and over-generalisations may apply to cultural background, lifestyle, sexual preference, gender, age, even political or ideological preference.

We are all ethnocentric to some degree, especially if we have not lived in at least two very different cultures. We are likely to view our way of doing things as the only way, or the right way: we don't have accents, everyone else does. We may know about difference, but in our heart of hearts think that other ways are quaint or inferior: I'm cool, I can eat with chopsticks (but forks, spoons and knives make much more sense). There is ethnocentrism based on dimensions other than cultures, however, which are even more insidious. There is, for example, professional ethnocentrism, or viewing some of the basic tenets of early childhood philosophy and practice as universally and unalterably true, when in fact they are culturally based or even based on our own individual values. Gonzalez-Mena (1993, p. xi) reminds us of this:

> *Though we may seem to be operating out of universal child development principles, the truth is that those principles occur in a cultural context. You can't remove from a cultural framework the ways you relate to children, rear them, determine program curriculum, handle daily routines, and even view the landmarks of physical development.*

The Code of Ethics

The Australian Early Childhood Association's (AECA) Code of Ethics should provide a basis for applying an anti-bias perspective to work with young children and their families. This Code, developed over two years through broad consultations with the early childhood field, was ratified in 1990. While it does not provide prescriptive answers to complex issues, in as much as the nature of being a professional is dealing with situations where there are no prescriptive answers and therefore having to apply professional judgement to the situation, the Code aims to be a guide to assist early childhood professionals in all roles in the total range of early childhood services in their practice. It deals with our professional obligations, and is the basis upon which early childhood professionals should build their practice.

The AECA Code is divided into five sections, each focusing on a specific target of professional obligations: children, families, colleagues, the community, and oneself as a professional. These sections are preceded by an overarching statement of commitment (Stonehouse, 1991, *Our Code of Ethics at Work*, p. 4):

> *Adherence to this code necessarily involves a commitment to:*
>
> - *View the well-being of the individual child as having fundamental importance;*
> - *Acknowledge the uniqueness of each person;*
> - *Consider the needs of the child in the context of the family and culture, as the family has a major influence on the young child;*
> - *Take into account the critical impact of self-esteem on an individual's development;*
> - *Base practice on sound knowledge, research, and theories, while at the same time recognising the limitations and uncertainties of these;*
> - *Work to fulfil the right of all children and their families to services of high quality.*

In the first section of the Code which deals with obligations to children, Item 10 is:

> *I will respect the special relationship between children and their families and incorporate this perspective in all my interactions with children.*

Section II of the Code focuses specifically on our professional obligations to families:

In relation to families, I will:

1. *Encourage families to share their knowledge of their child with me and reciprocate by sharing my knowledge of children in general with parents so that there is mutual growth and understanding in ways that benefit the child.*
2. *Strive to develop positive relationships with families that are based on mutual trust and open communication.*
3. *Engage in shared decision making with families.*
4. *Acknowledge families' existing strengths and competence as a basis for supporting them in their task of nurturing their child.*
5. *Acknowledge the uniqueness of each family and the significance of its culture, customs, language and beliefs.*
6. *Maintain confidentiality.*
7. *Respect the right of the family to privacy.*
8. *Consider situations from each family's perspective, especially if differences or tensions arise.*
9. *Assist each family to develop a sense of belonging to the services in which their child participates.*
10. *Acknowledge that each family is affected by the community context in which it operates.*

An anti-bias approach that starts with the families

The remainder of this chapter will look more closely at some of these items in the Code as a way of focusing on the application of anti-bias perspectives to partnerships with parents and families in early childhood programs.

- **View the well-being of the individual child as having fundamental importance.**
- **Consider the needs of the child in the context of the family and culture, as the family has a major influence on the young child.**
- **Respect the special relationship between children and their families and incorporate this perspective in all my interactions with children.**

It sounds easy, but as with most things, doing it is harder than saying it. It was much simpler in many ways for early childhood professionals in the days when less emphasis was placed on negotiating with parents, when the family and cultural context was not seen as being so important.

There is currently increasing acceptance in the early childhood profession of the need to see the child in the context of the family and culture, to move away from doctrinaire notions of sacred early childhood practice, the rightness of practice no matter the context, the culture or the child.

This is confusing for some early childhood professionals. Does it mean that we simply do what parents want? After all, a client-centred focus is a cornerstone in all discussions of quality in any service. What about quality? What about the role of professional knowledge, skills and expertise? Is there no place for that?

If we regard the child in his/her family context, what does that mean if the child is from a cultural background where strong views are held about distinct appropriate activities and roles for males and females? A view of the child as 'disembodied' makes it easier to decide what to do when a father announces under no circumstances is his son to dress up in girl's clothes.

> If a mother requests that you keep her two-year-old son awake in the afternoon so that he will go to bed earlier at night, and this is a child who shows signs of being tired after lunch, a 'disembodied' child approach makes it easy to reach the conclusion that this is not in the best interests of the child and to deny the mother's request. What happens, however, if we throw in consideration of the fact that this mother is a sole parent who is completing a TAFE qualification in order to get employment and make a better life for her and her child, and it is nearing the end of term and she has a lot of assignments and tests to prepare for? It becomes more difficult to decide what is in the child's best interest when the child is viewed in the context of his family. Careful exercise of professional judgement and skills of negotiation are called for in this situation.

Another example is one that has been used frequently in workshopping the Code of Ethics:

> You are having an end-of-year party, and parents have provided food. You suddenly notice that four-year-old Ali, whose family is Muslim, is just finishing off a ham sandwich. Do you tell his parents when they come to pick him up?

Keeping in mind that the essence of an ethical dilemma is that there is no obvious universal right answer, the above situation is a good one for thinking about the child in the context of family, the need to establish and maintain trust between family and early childhood professionals, the significance of religious and culturally based practices in early childhood programs, and the level of appropriate honesty in communications with parents.

To the extent that we undermine, ignore, or implicitly or explicitly criticise a child's life and experience outside the program, we do not help the child to develop into a confident human being.

Early childhood professionals may reject embracing a multicultural approach or an anti-bias approach because they assume that it requires substantial expertise about different cultures. While the more knowledge and sensitivity we have, the more effectively we can implement a truly multicultural program, they are not essential. What is required is openness, enthusiasm, and a willingness to seek out and use the resources available among the families in the program and in the broader community. Families in the program are the greatest resource, and securing information from them ensures that what happens in the program is relevant and supportive of home and community life.

- **Acknowledge the uniqueness of each person.**
- **Acknowledge the uniqueness of each family and the significance of its culture, customs, language and beliefs.**

Every family is unique. It is important that early childhood professionals acknowledge this and avoid stereotypes or overgeneralisations

Photograph: Cathy Laudenbach

A sensible anti-bias approach starts with the families in the program and in the community, and in this way overgeneralisations and stereotypes are avoided. The central message here, as it is with much of the anti-bias approach, is that difference is okay; difference is often just difference, not better or worse.

A major point here is that we should check ourselves any time we make assumptions about people without having evidence. We do that all the time — we assume things because of appearance, dress, gender, as well as cultural background. If you were asked to describe the typical single parent family, what would you say? If you are told that an Aboriginal family is starting in your program next week, and that is all you are told, what images and assumptions come to mind? Be honest, you don't have to tell anyone what they are. Where do these come from? How do they interfere with forming partnerships with families?

Staff who work together who are trying to implement an anti-bias program should make a pact to pick each other up when they are stereotyping people or being ethnocentric.

To use a common stereotype, there should be no assumption that if someone is a 'true blue Anglo-Aussie' (whatever that is) then they will like Vegemite, be a keen participant in sports, will be able to sing the second verse of 'Advance Australia Fair', be a keen follower of Australian Rules football or rugby, or will own a pair of thongs.

We must remember, too, that among people from a particular cultural background there are varying degrees of identity with that culture. This is particularly true with cultural groups that have been oppressed and disempowered traditionally. I am thinking here especially of people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, where there are substantial variations in the extent to which people identify as Aboriginal. We should not assume strong identity, just as we should not assume that it is appropriate to ignore cultural background.

As stated earlier, we need to remember that a person is a person first. When someone is different, we tend to overemphasise that difference, make it salient. It even affects the language we use. A powerful example is the common use of the term 'Down Syndrome' or 'Down Syndrome child', as in 'We have a little Down Syndrome that comes to the centre once a week'. That child is not a Down Syndrome — she is a child with Down Syndrome. Whatever the differences, we are more alike than we are different. That child is first a person — a person with strengths, interests, needs — a unique individual.

We must avoid relating to people according to cultural identity or other difference. For example, a parent in your program who strongly identifies as Aboriginal may have excellent computer skills or may play the flute or may be able to give advice to the centre about suitable fencing.

Similarly, we must avoid attributing all behaviours to a person's cultural background. When someone is obviously different in some way — for example, cultural background — there is a tendency to assume that everything they say and do derives from this difference. Ironically, this is particularly likely if early childhood professionals are making a genuine attempt to embrace a multicultural anti-bias approach and to negotiate and be accepting of parents' preferences. For example, a parent who appears to set no limits, to 'let his child get away with murder', may simply be a parent who lacks skills and confidence as a parent, and therefore would benefit from some supportive assistance. We must avoid tendencies to leave things alone because the family is different in some way. There are huge variations within cultures.

The aim is to establish an atmosphere in an early childhood program where difference is fine. As a parent who was the only one from a particular cultural background at her child's centre said, 'Everyone is different here, and difference is accepted, celebrated in fact, so there doesn't need to be someone like me for me to feel comfortable.'

- **Take into account the critical impact of self-esteem on an individual's development.**

Parents are developing too, and we often forget that. Low self-esteem on the part of parents may manifest itself in their adopting a critical stance towards the service and the staff, being non-responsive or uncooperative. Parents and other family members from cultural groups that have been marginalised or victimised may be sceptical or wary at best, until they know the program and the staff, and at worst defensive and operating with a view that they are not competent and respected. Parents from non-Anglo-Australian cultural backgrounds may face particular obstacles to viewing themselves as capable, confident parents.

The most critically important role of staff is to support parents' views of themselves as the child's most important person, no matter how long the separations and how early in the child's life participation in day care began. This does not mean that early childhood professionals should not at times impart information to parents or suggest a different way of doing things, but this must be done in a way that demonstrates respect and a belief that all but a very small minority of parents are doing the best they can with their children given what they know, the resources they have, and the competing pressures in their lives.

Early childhood professionals should take every opportunity to reinforce the idea that parents and family are the most important people in the child's life.

- **Encourage families to share their knowledge of their child with me and reciprocate by sharing my knowledge of children in general with parents so that there is mutual growth and understanding in ways that benefit the child.**

Parents and other family members close to the child are experts on the child, and that expertise and knowledge are a major contribution they can make to the partnership with early childhood professionals. They have biographical information, insights and knowledge that is useful. Early childhood professionals, on the other hand, usually have substantial experience with many children and knowledge about children in general. This helps them to see a particular child in a broad context, more dispassionately and objectively than parents are able to do.

Genuinely seeking and showing valuing of the knowledge and perspectives of parents and other family members is a way of empowering parents, assisting them to feel as though they are legitimate partners in the child's experience in the program.

Parents from cultural backgrounds other than those of the staff can help to put their child's behaviour in a cultural perspective. People who have lived in the past or who currently live in two cultures, as do many Aboriginal families today, have a heightened awareness of cultural contrasts that those of us who have not experienced more than one culture may lack. Some specific suggestions follow:

- Use parents as sources of information about their child;
- Discuss problems with them in a supportive way; demonstrate 'honest optimism' when you share a problem or a puzzlement with the parents;
- Use parents as sources of information about the cultural context in which their family and child live their daily lives;
- Avoid expecting parents to know what you know about children in general. Accept them as experts on their child;
- Strive to develop positive relationships with families that are based on mutual trust and open communication.

Trust cannot usually be hurried with any families; and with families who are labelled as 'different' in some way, there may be extra barriers to trust. Understanding breeds trust, and understanding comes from open communication. Some people are fearful of difference; that fear, in fact, is one of the roots of prejudice. Families that perceive themselves to be different may expect not to be trusted, and this creates barriers as well.

The first step to establishing trust is for staff to acknowledge and then to examine their prejudices and fears about all sorts of differences. People who deny having any prejudices are not looking closely enough at themselves.

Staff should not shy away from communicating with parents because they fear making a mistake. Genuine attempts will almost always be positively acknowledged.

- **Engage in shared decision-making with families.**

One of the most powerful means of establishing a positive relationship is to enlist parents and other relevant family members in making decisions about their child. This demonstrates respect and acknowledgement of their important role in their child's life.

It is a worthwhile exercise to think about and list the areas where, in your program, there is shared decision-making with parents. In a staff meeting where there is sufficient time, think about practices or areas that fall under three categories:

1. ***'Sacreds', 'bottom lines'*** — those practices where you will not compromise, no matter what parents want. This may be because of philosophies, policies or regulations. An obvious example is that you will not smack a child, no matter what the parent wants.
2. ***Shared decision-making*** — those areas where things are negotiated, discussed and, where differences exist, it is usually possible to arrive at a compromise.
3. ***Parents' decision*** — those areas where parents can decide.

I suggest that if the list under number 1 is very long, it would be worthwhile examining the extent to which you have established partnerships, as defined previously, with the families of the children with whom you work. If the list under number 2 is not the longest, a similar exercise is advisable.

As indicated previously, it is much easier to operate with the clear understanding by everyone that the professional knows best and is perfectly capable of making decisions about children, but the price paid for that way of operating is parental alienation and disempowerment, and perhaps a diluted parent–child relationship. It may be particularly easy when there is an obvious cultural difference for professionals to lapse into absolutes: this is the way we do things in Australia. This is dangerous and must be guarded against.

It was interesting in the consultations with the field that were part of the process of developing the Code of Ethics that a number of people wanted the obligation to engage in shared decision-making with parents to be qualified — that is, for the phrase 'when appropriate' to be added. The notion of shared decision-making makes some early childhood professionals feel uncomfortable. It does not mean that every decision is a 50–50 compromise. It means that parents' requests are welcomed, respected and taken seriously.

- **Acknowledge families' existing strengths and competence as a basis for supporting them in their task of nurturing their child.**

This item in the Code is about focusing on strengths rather than deficits. It is essentially applying a basic tenet of our beliefs about working with children to working with their families. In fact, most of the basic tenets of working with children can be so applied. It is about a mind set, a view that looks at difference not necessarily in a negative way, a determination to actively and vigorously search for strengths and build on them. For example, a language other than English being spoken at home, and family members' English being less than perfect, can be looked at in two ways. One can focus on the deficit, the inability to communicate easily in English, or the strength, which is that a child growing up in such a family will eventually be bilingual. A child who seems to move around among several households, who has different people bringing her to the program regularly, can be viewed as lacking security and stability in her life, or as having numbers of people who know her, care about her and feel responsible for her.

We have a natural tendency to be ethnocentric, so that any family constellation that is not the norm is seen as lacking something. While it may lack something, it may also have particular strengths and advantages for the child which the so-called 'normal family' (whatever that is) lacks. These strengths and advantages should not be overlooked.

- **Consider situations from each family's perspective, especially if differences or tensions arise.**

Empathy, putting oneself in the shoes of another, is the foundation for positive relationships in any arena, as well as for high quality in early childhood programs.

Some understanding of the cultural context is useful. Behaviour of families that may otherwise just seem irresponsible, uncaring, non-child centred, or just plain weird takes on meaning when understood in the context of the family. For example, a family not bringing a child regularly to the program may just appear to be negligent or unreliable unless it is understood that this family puts high priority on the needs of all extended family members, and when another's needs interfere with getting the child to the program, the child does not come. It is easy for early childhood professionals to be professionally egocentric, as it is our role to put the child's needs first. Family members, parents in particular, have a number of roles and responsibilities: they are parents, spouses or partners, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, and these roles may take precedence over that of parent at times.

An obvious example: when a child does not bring the money requested for an excursion or fails to attend on the day, it may very well be that the family does not have it, but is ashamed to say so.

- **Assist each family to develop a sense of belonging to the services in which their child participates.**

While partnership goes far beyond involvement and/or participation, any program that encourages genuine partnerships with parents offers a number of ways for family members to feel 'connected' to the program. These may range from contributing materials, participating in the program for children, doing a job or providing a service, to being an active member of the management committee. All of these ways are good ways, but they are means to an end, and not an end in themselves. In and of themselves they do not bring about partnership, as partnership is a matter of attitude and spirit based on respect and communication. In other words, it is possible to have a partnership with a parent who is not involved in the life of the service. It is hard not to feel more positive towards those parents who throw themselves into the life of the centre, but that should be avoided.

It is particularly tempting to involve families from non-Anglo-Australian cultures in tokenistic ways, getting them to come in and 'do something from their culture': cook, dance, show artefacts, display traditional dress. These activities need to be thought about carefully, as they run the risk of highlighting difference, and can easily fit the category of 'tourist curriculum', described in Derman-Sparks and the ABC Task Force (1989). While having amusement value, planners of programs need to examine these types of activities carefully to ensure that they are valuable for children and that they do not give family members a feeling that they are only valued for their difference.

Similarly, with good intentions, parents from non-Anglo-Australian cultures are often pressured into going on to management or parent committees, because their presence symbolises to the staff and parents that they have a commitment to an anti-bias approach. While this is a good thing if the parent is confident and ready to be on the committee, it is tokenistic and achieves nothing but disempowerment of that parent if they are not comfortable with that role.

In the end, a sense of belonging comes mostly from the relationship with the people who work with the child, and the quality of the daily communication that occurs.

- **Acknowledge that each family is affected by the community context in which it operates.**

Families that are 'different' in some way, whether because of their composition, their cultural background, or the different abilities of their members, may live in communities where they are, at best, reacted to with discomfort and lack of understanding, and, at worst, with discrimination, racism and prejudice. This will obviously affect the way they approach the early childhood service. They may be ambivalent or uncomfortable with their difference, or very proud of it. In an effort to do what they perceive is best for their child, they may be wanting their child to assimilate, to become 'Anglo-Aussie' as quickly as possible.

The very large majority of families want what is best for their child, and early childhood professionals need to operate with that belief. Parents and families, for a whole variety of reasons, not the least of which is that they may not have had the benefit of years of study and experience, may have ideas that are different from ours about how to achieve what is best for their child. We need to hear what they have to say, value it, and encourage the combining of our professional knowledge and their passionate commitment to an in-depth knowledge of the child, their investment in the child's history and their critical role in the child's future, to weave a path that is in the child's best interests.

- **Work to fulfil the right of all children and their families to services of high quality.**

If early childhood professionals adopt the Code of Ethics and make every effort to adhere to it, they will affirm respect for difference and openness, and actively counter bias and prejudice in their efforts to provide all children and their families access to services of high quality. The presence of bias, prejudice, stereotyping, tokenism or pressure for homogeneity necessarily means that the program is not of high quality.

An early childhood program that truly embraces an anti-bias approach to families based on giving priority to the establishment of partnerships with families will go far beyond tolerance. Tolerance is not enough — as tolerance implies putting up with something. The rewards of a much more pro-active and enthusiastic embracing of difference in the context of acknowledging common shared humanity are manifold.

For further thought and discussion

1. List some of the prejudices that you have (we all have them). What is the source of these? Do they affect your communications or relationships with parents?
2. Discuss with your colleagues any experiences you have had where you felt different from everyone else.
3. Describe and discuss with your colleagues your idea of the 'perfect parent' in an early childhood program. Describe the kind of parent you find most difficult to get along with.
4. Discuss the ethical dilemmas (Ali and the ham sandwich, and the parent's request not to allow the child to sleep).
5. Take a program you know well. Do the exercise, described on page 203, of listing the sacreds, the areas of shared decision-making and parents' decisions. Do you believe that the balance is appropriate?
6. What is the difference between parent involvement and participation and parent–staff partnership?
7. What are some of the obstacles to achieving a partnership between staff and parents?

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NOTE: Readers wanting more specific information about working with parents from diverse cultural backgrounds are referred to *Opening the Doors* by Anne Stonehouse (1991, Australian Early Childhood Association, Canberra), particularly Chapter 4, 'Partnerships with parents'.

CHAPTER 14

Staff Development: Dealing with Diversity

BARBARA CREASER

Having experienced anti-bias courses in the United States on several occasions, I had the desire to convey the anti-bias approach to early childhood educators working with young children in Australia. There are none worse than the converted! I was converted and convinced that there were a great many ideas and ideals held by early childhood professionals that needed re-thinking, and some actions which needed to be taken in the light of the anti-bias approach.

Louise Derman-Sparks and several members of the Anti-Bias Curriculum Task Force had a profound effect on me when I spent time at Pacific Oaks College in California completing a Master's Degree in Human Development. I had arrived at the college as a person with broad experience, but with a very homogeneous background, friends and colleagues. I had travelled, and lived and worked in several countries; I had met a wide cross-section of people and seen how others lived; and yet I had never allowed those encounters to change my view of the world.

The courses at Pacific Oaks College, and the anti-bias courses in particular, taught me, at the age of 47, that there were 'many ways of being in the world', that my way was only one, and that it was not the one right way.

The anti-bias classes forced me to review my life and beliefs, to consider that there may be alternatives to the beliefs I held so strongly. Alternative beliefs and ways of life were not right or wrong, but different, and that difference can add richness to our lives. I discovered I was a different person from the one I had been for so long. I found I opened up to new ideas and new people in a way that previously would not have been possible, because I would not have allowed it to happen.

Jones (1986, p. 92) talks of the advantages of having diverse groups where people are likely to challenge each other's ideas.

> *Increasingly I have come to believe that the unexpected question or comment, which is a product either of diversity or of divergent thinking, has exceptional educational value . . . We can dismiss them . . . in an effort to keep our dignity and prejudices intact, but dignity gets in the way of understanding. Working hard to maintain our image as persons worthy of respect, we lose the opportunity to see the world freshly — a view which just might expose us as vain and foolish, out of date, out of place, out of touch with reality.*

Life at Pacific Oaks College involved risk-taking and was so much richer in its diversity because of it.

This chapter is not my story, but the personal introduction serves to entice others to open up to the possibilities that the anti-bias approach offers. In Australia, already there have been those who denounce 'anti-bias', often without sufficient information and understanding. Anti-bias is not about preventing boys from playing with trucks, it is not about banning the celebration of Christmas, but it is about thinking how our society has changed over the past years (and is continuing to change). Anti-bias is about helping young children to live and grow in communities where acceptance and caring prevail. Such places allow children to cooperate and thrive rather than to have to compete in order to survive.

Within the early childhood field there is a need for practitioners who are committed to the anti-bias approach, who will provide programs and environments that are caring and safe for children, and who will take an active role in influencing children and parents, colleagues and the wider community. Through anti-bias courses, some staff have already brought about significant changes in their childcare centres and in their own daily lives.

Anti-bias inservice

The anti-bias course described in this chapter was developed with the intent of helping adults who work with young children to change their attitudes and beliefs over time, and to take steps to change programs and environments for children, to reflect the anti-bias approach.

The course was in modular form, taking nine two-hourly sessions over nine months. Eighteen people from a variety of children's services undertook the course which involved them in a commitment of time, a commitment to do 'home work' each month, a commitment to read articles and books recommended and provided by the trainers, and a commitment to move from their current philosophical stand to one that was more tolerant, more open, and more active with regard to the diversity in our society and the resultant bias that exists.

Some participants were knowledgeable about the anti-bias approach but wanted to learn more about strategies for dealing with bias and discriminatory behaviours that they encountered. They needed support and confirmation to instil confidence.

The aims of the course were to:

- Heighten awareness of the bias that exists in the community;
- Develop strategies for confronting issues relating to discriminatory practices; and
- Develop skills to enable participants to promote the anti-bias approach with colleagues, children and families, and the wider community.

It was hoped that, through the course, participants would:

- **Benefit from sharing ideas with the group**

> *Some of my students know more than I do about things their peers want to know. All students whatever their background, know things about their own unique experiences that are worth sharing. We are studying*

> *human development, which each of them has experienced first hand. It's my responsibility to put them in touch with each other. (Jones, 1986, p. 40)*

Anti-bias is an area of human development. The participants in our course had experiences to share and learn from, and time was put aside each session for discussion.

- **Accept differences in themselves and others**

  Recent research on teachers frequently focuses on people's life history, what they are as a result of their life experiences. Participants in an anti-bias course bring with them unique histories which not only dictate their starting point but must affect how they respond to new ideas and information. Those histories make us all different (Hawthorne, 1994).

- **Become aware of bias in society and in their own workplace in particular**

  Early childhood educators are probably more likely to have been exposed to issues of gender equity (Butterworth, 1991) and teachers' differing treatment of boys and girls (Ebbeck, 1985) than to other issues of bias affecting children. The course was designed to encourage participants to look at their own settings dispassionately and observe the discrimination that occurs.

- **Gain confidence to confront bias**

  > *Consider the implication if diversity is viewed as something to be managed. Does this mean that diversity causes things to be out of control and is a problem to be contained? Or is it a resource to be cultivated and used as a way to strengthen human productivity? (Greene, 1994, p. 92)*

A goal of the course was to help people appreciate diversity and view the challenges it brings in a positive light.

- **Create anti-bias work attitudes and environments; and**
- **Work with children so that the children develop a healthy self-image and have empathy for others, learn to think critically and feel empowered to take action in 'unfair' situations.**

The nine modules of the course were entitled:

1. What is anti-bias? Our values and where they come from
2. Creating an anti-bias environment (1)
3. Creating an anti-bias environment (2)
4. Learning about our diverse society
5. Learning about disability
6. Learning about gender and equal opportunity for children

7. Learning about families and what is a 'normal' family
8. Celebrations — who's in charge?
9. Summary and review

The format of the course was planned with the knowledge that:

- The participants were from different types of early childhood services with different training.

> *I was aware, too, that the participants were at different stages in their own professional development and so were likely to respond to different ways of teaching. Some were beginning teachers, some were experienced directors, and some were in charge of large programs. The developmental stages of survival, consolidation, renewal and maturity, and the training needs of people at each stage, were taken into account in the planning of the sequence of the sessions and the teaching strategies. (Katz, 1977)*

- I wanted people to reflect on information given and have time to observe and record between sessions.
- Adults learn in different ways.
- Participants would bring with them a wide variety of experiences and would benefit and learn from discussion with each other.
- The everyday experiences of the participants would provide examples of bias in our society.
- Attitudinal change takes time and can be very threatening.

> *Changing attitudes and beliefs takes time. Remember that each individual needs . . . to change at their own pace . . . The overall message is one of valuing each individual for the skills and background they have — this includes their family background, race, beliefs, language and so on. Each individual sees the world through their own perspectives and with assistance, through the perspectives of others. (Arthur et al., 1993, p. 53)*

- The easiest change to make might be to change the environment in which they worked.

The readings and discussions led people to think about how their work settings reflected the diversity that existed in the community. An anti-bias checklist was developed which they could take back to their workplace and use for all the areas of the anti-bias curriculum to see if diversity was represented.

How were the different age groups represented in the centre? on the staff team? in the visitors who were invited to take part in the program? in the characters in stories, books, puzzles and posters? in outings by the children? in dress-ups provided? Were the elderly always depicted with grey hair and walking sticks?

How were people with disabilities represented in the centre? on the staff team? in the visitors who took part in the program? in the characters in stories, books, puzzles and posters? as normal enrolments in the centre? Were they depicted and treated as separate from the rest of the group, or were they integrated and provided for on an individual basis just like any other child?

How could the workplace be changed to show that an anti-bias approach was being introduced? One centre arranged a large notice-board which indicated to all the parents that the celebrations in the centre were being reassessed and that the staff were working on making them child-centred rather than feeling driven by the commercialism that surrounded them.

Another centre did a check on the children's books to find out if there was a balance. They looked for books that were non-sexist, that showed males and females in non-traditional roles, books that represented children and families from different races and cultures, books that included people of different ages and abilities. There were some books which should only be used if they were used with discussion about their obvious bias. They were examples of less suitable content for young children, but rather than remove them from the library they could be used with children to point out the biased view projected.

Confronting bias in society

At the beginning of the course, I covered something of the history of the anti-bias approach. Having been at Pacific Oaks at the time of its conception I could offer a very intimate account of that early work, of the discussions, the making of a video (Derman-Sparks, 1989), and the anticipation surrounding publication of the *Anti-Bias Curriculum* book (Derman-Sparks & the ABC Task Force, 1989). Initially, members of the group seemed nonchalant about the types of discrimination that occur in the United States and Australian society, as if they were negligible and of little importance. However, discussion within the group about times when they had experienced discrimination, or had observed others being discriminated against, created more of a response. Bias in their everyday lives was a reality for some of the participants. For others, there were particular times in their lives when they had felt different or powerless. When we began to look at why the discriminatory practices occurred, people realised that the reasons were very unfair and often quite illogical.

The second time we met, and at each subsequent meeting, there was time at the beginning of the meeting for people to give examples of bias or discrimination they had noted during the intervening month. There were many examples given, and some of the participants expressed surprise that the biases were so blatantly obvious in society. They were shocked that they had previously been oblivious. Some found that members of their own family had acted in biased ways or used unacceptably biased terms. Participants were confronted with and shocked by the enormity of the 'problem'.

Along with acknowledging that bias did exist in our society, we also began to explore our own biases. Were we biased? Some of us probably thought we were not. How did we come to feel differently about some people? Did we have feelings associated with skin colour? with poverty? with accents? with disability? At first it was hard for people to admit to some of their feelings and I suspect some talked in the group 'as if they could do no wrong', as one of the participants commented in an early written evaluation. However, over time, people became more willing to speak openly and honestly about their own biases. They were able to check themselves, for example, when they found they were using sexist language or stereotypic terms. They also gained confidence and would check each other in class, or tell stories of how they had called a halt at dinner parties to jokes that were culturally biased or insensitive to people's feelings. They quickly learned that taking action was not easy, and sometimes they were ridiculed for their efforts.

Participants' comments after the fourth meeting illustrated that they were surprised at the amount of bias they experienced between meetings. Nikki noticed 'the amount of negative anecdotes compared to the positive examples' that people brought back to the meetings. Prue was appalled at her 'previous inability to perceive bias' when it now seemed so blatantly obvious to her.

Confronting our own biases and deciding to change

The ways in which participants developed during the course were many and varied. Some were aware of the anti-bias approach before the course, and it confirmed and strengthened their commitment. Having contact with others of a similar view spurred them on to continue to speak up and take action in their own lives and in their workplaces.

> *The skills, knowledge and attitudes of the staff are the most important influence on the quality of the program . . . the success of their efforts to take into account the . . . diversity that characterises the community depends not mainly on their knowledge of other cultures . . . but on their willingness to be flexible, to change, to look critically at their own biases and prejudices, and their appreciation of diversity. (Stonehouse, 1991, p. 40)*

Some participants found it difficult to accept that they needed to reconsider their values and stance. They remained defensive of their own view and were not immediately able to open up to some of the new possibilities. Some were aggressively defensive, some were silent (with an internal battle going on?), and some were able to express what was happening for them. 'Sometimes I felt that being a white Australian was a bad thing.' Lottie found the beginning of the course helpful, inspiring and challenging, 'and scary too. The inservice is very useful and should be compulsory for *everybody*.' And Prue: 'This has been an extraordinarily useful exercise. The data has been both surprising and at times deeply and emotionally disturbing.'

On discovering that their personal beliefs and attitudes were 'narrow' and not inclusive, these people experienced a sense of disequilibrium as they cogitated on the issues around acceptance of diversity. Have I been wrong all this time? Do I dare change my basic values and beliefs? In my work with young children, am I courageous enough to have another staff member observe me for how I treat girls and boys? Can the research on preschool teachers' responses to boys and girls really be true? Maybe it doesn't happen in child care?

What about the families I work with? Do I know about their composition? Am I accepting of gay and lesbian families? Do I accept but ignore them, or do I accept and acknowledge them and give them the support that I would afford to all the other families? With people with disabilities, do I respond to them as individuals in the same way as others, or do I avoid contact?

Can I accept that I am homophobic? Do I have accurate information about AIDS? Can I talk openly about gay and lesbian families, and accept those who may be part of the child care centre where I work?

Are there families and children in the centre that I have negative feelings towards? Why? What can I do to be more accepting? Are there families about whom I have very little knowledge? Why? How can I possibly plan for the individual child in that family? How can I support those children in the significant events in their daily lives if I don't know their cultural backgrounds and the families' practices and traditions?

For the majority, notwithstanding the disturbance and discomfort of having to re-think long-held values, the process of attitudinal change was a positive one.

> *It's been wonderful, an eye-opening experience — lots of confronting of my own bias and that has been such a positive experience!*
>
> *I find myself going through different stages. That in itself is healthy, and I hope to finish with a different outlook.*

The first changes these people made were to the environment in which they worked. Along with making those changes gently, they were developing personally from the inservice sessions and gradually realising how much bias existed and therefore how important it was for them to be prepared to take action on a number of fronts: in their family, among their friends and acquaintances, and in their workplaces. To confront bias in all of these situations required confidence and conviction. A side-effect of the group was that it provided the participants with peer support.

> *A support group is essential for preparing for and implementing anti-bias curriculum . . . Ongoing support while we try out anti-bias activities . . . share successes, evaluate mistakes, provide encouragement and plan strategies to get past hard spots. (Derman-Sparks & the ABC Task Force, 1989, p. 112)*

Reflecting on our own attitudes, beliefs and values

Our own beliefs and values come from our parents, family and cultural background, our upbringing, our religion, our education, our friends and peers, our work and colleagues, and our life experiences. We are all touched by society in general, and the values of the society in which we live convey to us information about people. Sometimes that information is biased. The institutionalised bias (racism, sexism, handicappism and homophobia) in society often ensures that some groups of people hold the power and others always remain oppressed.

> *Institutional 'isms' have a profound impact on the quality of education for young children. The number of young children lacking needed childcare programs is an example of institutional sexism. Lack of quality inservice training for working with differently abled children in many settings is an example of handicappism. (Derman-Sparks & the ABC Task Force, 1989, p. 113)*

Lottie commented on her 'realisation that a lot of this stuff is institutionalised and accepted with little thought, and [she experienced] the feeling of wondering how much is institutionalised in ME!'

The beliefs and values that are influenced by our families are often built over years and accepted without question. In adulthood, sometimes we are confronted by issues that cause us to reassess our values. This was the case with the anti-bias course. Suddenly there was the need to think about some of our dearly held family and societal values.

Through society and family there were stereotypes that some of us accepted. Now, with new information, some of those stereotypes were being shattered. With information about colleagues' experiences, we realised that some of those images were quite unfair. We had stereotyped ideas about age and ability. Society suggests that the elderly are not capable of full-time work. It is also struggling with accepting those with intellectual disability into mainstream schooling and later into the workforce.

Participants in the group found that they had to reconsider some of those attitudes which to date they had accepted unthinkingly.

Reflection, we felt, was crucial; and one of the strategies that was used by Pacific Oaks which we omitted was a written journal that each participant kept and shared with the course leaders. This omission was a pity, because one of the course participants said that at first everyone spoke as if they could do no wrong, and she questioned whether they were feeling threatened. If a means of written reflection had been an option, some of the unspoken comments may have surfaced.

Journals, of course, are confidential and the issues may only be raised with permission. However, putting one's thoughts in writing often makes it easier to speak up about them.

Learning more about race, class, culture, disability, gender, homophobia, ageism, and the events we celebrate

Different sessions dealt with racism, class and culture, disability, gender, homophobia, ageism, and the events we celebrate. We used the *Anti-Bias Curriculum* book for much of the content. Participants were questioned about the knowledge they had concerning these topics and were frequently taken aback to realise how little they knew. For example, they were accepting enrolments from other cultures but they knew very little of the daily customs and practices of those families. They were celebrating events like Halloween but had little or no understanding of the history of the event and had not stopped to consider whether it contained suitable content for young children.

Of the discussion around celebrations, one participant said: 'Our discussions on celebrations really made me think.' Another said: 'We all react to sexist comments, but when we can react to other "negative" comments in the same way, we would be moving on.'

Outcomes of the anti-bias course

The immediate evaluations of the course were positive:

> *I had done reading on the topic, but I realise now that reading was only the beginning; workshops make things happen.*
>
> *Almost every document I read and every piece of work I prepare is now looked at in a different way.*
>
> *My relationships with the ethnic workers have been greatly enhanced and my support is much more valuable to them.*

Workshops for young children

Soon after the course, two of the participants worked together on a workshop entitled 'Appreciating Differences: An Anti-Bias Approach for Children 3 to 12 Years'. They enlisted the assistance of a third person whose interest was multiculturalism. The workshop came from the need they felt to address children's questions. These three women worked to integrate children with special needs into mainstream child care and out of school hours care, and questions like 'Why can't Joe talk?' or 'How come Mary screams all the time?' arose frequently. The anti-bias course inspired them to extend the workshop from physical and cognitive differences to gender equity and cultural awareness.

The workshops were conducted in a number of centres with children aged three to five years. The children involved were divided into three groups and rotated through three work-stations for 15-minute periods. As well as the three stations with the three adults in charge, there were also three dramatic play areas that the children could select in free play periods. These were:

1. The home corner with all the usual home-corner gear, but with pictures of men and women involved in domestic activity and a garage setting with hard hats, woodworking materials, construction kits and tool sets.
2. A 'hospital' with dress-ups and equipment such as wheelchairs, crutches and aids for the visually and hearing impaired.
3. Cultural dress-ups with sarongs, kimonos, grass skirts, and varied headwear, footwear and carry bags.

The dramatic play areas supported gender equity, physical difference and cultural awareness. At times, the home corner included utensils from cultures other than Anglo-Australian. Music from a variety of cultures accompanied the free play.

At the work-stations, each of the adults presented picture discussions: what is this child wearing on his ears and why? And the children learned some sign language. Why does this person use a wheelchair? Here is a book about people's hair; let's check our hair and see how it is different. What about skin colour? A picture of ballet dancers including men, and a picture of police officers including women, led to a quiz on who does which occupation.

For each station there was a selection of suitable story books. After the children had been through all three stations, they were free to choose to play in any of the dramatic play areas.

It was noticeable that in some centres children were free in their choices of play and play materials and not constrained by gender. In other settings, however, it appeared that traditional stereotypes around gender did hamper children's choices.

The women who initiated these workshops experienced feelings of success because of the children's enthusiastic responses. The anti-bias course gave them the support they needed and a way to move forward with their commitment to an integration program.

Interviews with participants

Two years after the course, I interviewed Coralie, Stephanie and Lottie. All three were astonished, at the time of the course, to find that bias was so entrenched in society. They all have found since that they can respond and comment when they are confronted by bias or discriminatory behaviour. The following are some of their comments.

> **Stephanie:** *It's the language that I notice, when other people use inappropriate terms, and I'm conscious of my own language and think more carefully before I speak.*
>
> **Coralie:** *The greatest impact of the course for me was that I changed my approach to my own child. I hope that she will have a broader perspective on life and be more accepting.*

Both Lottie and Stephanie have taught classes of young adults and found that when they introduced issues to do with anti-bias, the students became aggressive and angry. Lottie and Stephanie expected there would be more openness and flexibility in this age group, but when it came to having their values challenged the young people were surprisingly defensive.

All three felt the need to know more about cultural mores and to have more information about taboos which affect males and females in various cultures. Lottie is more conscious of cultural backgrounds and of the importance of encouraging people to live by their cultures and use their own languages and their own given names.

Conclusion

There are several ways that anti-bias can be 'taught', but it is important to note that the outcomes of the different ways will vary. If people simply want information about the anti-bias approach, then a single meeting with an expert will suffice. If the desired outcome is for personal attitudinal change and environmental changes, then long-term inservice with time to observe, record and reflect between sessions is essential.

> *Its objectives, stated behaviorally, are that teachers will reflect on their practice in dialogue with other teachers, identify changes they want to try, try them, reflect on them, and continue making changes. (Jones, 1993, pp. 146–7)*

The structure and teaching strategies of the course need to be tailored to suit the participants, or flexible so that they will meet a variety of needs if the group is very diverse. There need to be oral, visual and written learning opportunities and theoretical and practical work. It is helpful for those who are working directly with children to have theoretical input and then have the chance to return to their workplaces to try out ideas in their practice.

Katz (1977) talks of first stage (survival) teachers needing support on the job, stage two (consolidation) needing on-site assistance and access to experts, and stages three and four (renewal and maturity) needing professional journals, books, courses and conferences, and colleagues. So if the course participants are at different stages in their careers, a smorgasbord of learning strategies is essential.

At the beginning of the chapter, I mentioned the need for early childhood personnel who are committed to the anti-bias approach. We need them to train others and to influence colleagues with whom they work.

Each time an anti-bias course concludes, I hope that the whole group will disperse and influence others, but I also hope that a few will feel the confidence and the commitment to train others. From the outcomes of this course it can be seen that for some participants the experience was personal and private. For Lottie, Stephanie and Coralie, the course developed them to a stage where together they could work publicly to train others.

> *Early childhood educators must learn to use the power of diversity to solve human problems. Whether the knowledge is applied in service settings or in political and advocacy arenas, professionals must become aware of the way overt or covert prejudices and 'isms' creep into language, attitudes, and actions. (Greene, 1994, p. 92)*

The modular long-term course was selected because attitudinal change is slow and I wanted people to have time to gain sufficient confidence and knowledge that they could be leaders for their centre staff teams, trainers of staff in their community programs, and teachers of adults doing tertiary courses.

> *Anti-bias is not a subject you can teach and be done with: it's a way of life. (Derman-Sparks & the ABC Task Force, 1989, p. 118)*

For some of us, life will never be the same again.

For further thought and discussion

1. In your workplace, have a discussion with other staff members about bias. Within the group, get people to think about times when they felt different and perhaps were made to feel powerless because of that difference. How did they cope with the situation? How did they feel? Were they the subject of discrimination?
2. With a staff team, talk about your values and how you have acquired them. Are your values the same as or different from those of your parents' generation? Why?
3. If you work directly with children, how much do you know about the cultural backgrounds of the children in your care?

   How much do you know about how that culture affects the everyday lives of those children?

   If you have a monocultural group, how do you plan to teach them to accept and respect diversity in our society? Discuss the resources, materials and people.

   How does your environment support our diverse society? Are there posters representing a range of children? Are there props which would be part of the daily lives of the children? Do notice-boards carry messages in different languages?
4. Does your work environment reflect the diversity of society in general? Does it reflect various racial and cultural backgrounds, ability groups and ages? How does it reflect this diversity?

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CHAPTER
15

Developing an Anti-Bias Approach in Program Planning

ANNE PAUL

Good Morning Baby

In early childhood settings, quality programming for children has focused on planning for the individual child. However, for a program to be truly individualised, there has to be provision for an environment and a program that is inclusive. A much stronger emphasis must be placed on looking at what children need to develop them to their fullest potential and to help them become informed, tolerant, empowered and empathetic individuals.

What seems to have been the 'missing link' in attaining a truly individualised program has been our failure to maximise opportunities for every child whatever their gender, race, colour of skin, cultural background, ability, and whatever their family types, family beliefs and lifestyles. This should be the basic aim of an anti-bias program — to maximise opportunities for all children.

One Chinese bowl in the home corner, one picture of a person in a wheelchair, and girls being encouraged to use blocks are fairly normal occurrences in early childhood programs, but too often there is little use made of them to extend children's knowledge in any way. An anti-bias program does not happen by accident or by introducing a few props. Rather, it is an approach which starts from a belief and commitment to the principles and goals of anti-bias and a willingness to take systematic steps to see that it happens on a daily basis and not as an 'add on' to the program.

Activities, routines, the materials we use, and our daily interactions with children need to reflect positive attitudes and perceptions about all people, in all their diversity. Children should be encouraged to approach difference as something to embrace and feel good about, rather than something to be fearful of, avoid or be biased towards. We also need to promote the idea that children can do something about unfairness towards themselves and others. The question is, how do we do this? The rest of this chapter sets out a number of steps that might be followed.

Step 1:
Formulate the principles and goals of an anti-bias program

Anti-bias principles in an early childhood service require that service to reflect the diversity of the local community and country in which we live and should be concerned with including all children and families in all aspects of the program, whatever their background. It is about a service which challenges and discards that which is biased, stereotyped and damaging to the self-esteem of individuals and groups of people in our communities and in particular to the people using our services.

Derman-Sparks and the ABC Task Force (1989) detail goals for the topics covered in each chapter of their book from which the following long-term goals were developed. The overall aim of maximising opportunities for all children, as discussed above, and the ideas from Derman-Sparks and the ABC Task Force led to the formulation of some specific goals which may ultimately help to develop short-term achievable goals for children in a program. These goals are detailed in Table 1.

TABLE 1
LONG-TERM GOALS OF AN ANTI-BIAS PROGRAM

1. To maximise children's self-esteem concerning their own identity (including their cultural identity).
2. To encourage children's awareness and acceptance of difference.
3. To foster children's interest and delight in diversity.
4. To develop children's awareness of their own country's history and cultures (including our indigenous culture).
5. To increase children's knowledge and appreciation of cultures other than their own.
6. To encourage children's positive attitudes towards others' beliefs and lifestyles.
7. To develop children's ability to deal with unfairness and bias shown towards themselves or others.
8. To encourage children's respect for others and their appreciation of the value of others, including those with disabilities.
9. To ensure that programs truly facilitate equality of opportunity for both boys and girls.
10. To ensure that children are assisted to value others and not exclude others on the basis of differences.
11. To ensure that staff feel valued, accepted and supported in their efforts to provide an inclusive and individualised program for children.
12. To ensure that all children and families feel welcome and appreciated and respected whatever their socioeconomic status, culture, colour of skin, race, ability, family type, belief system or lifestyle.

Identifying what we are aiming for in an anti-bias program is our starting point. We then need to consider how we actually achieve this.

Step 2:
Gain a commitment from staff

Early childhood professionals should have a commitment to providing anti-bias programs for children. As well as their desire to do this, government regulations for children's services and the national accreditation of child care centres assist us to maximise opportunities for all children as part of our professional responsibilities.

The ideas and the attitudinal change sometimes required in order to provide an anti-bias program may not be fully understood by all staff. In particular, the change in thinking required — to be able to actively deal with and challenge bias and stereotyping and promote diversity as positive and enriching — is quite different from what may have been the approach in the past. Previously our focus has been on the promotion of similarity, and in our endeavour to have all children treated equally this emphasis on 'sameness' has often caused children to be treated unequally. By denying differences, dismissing them as not relevant, we have in fact denied children's individuality and the self-esteem that comes from being accepted for who you are.

Staff need to be helped to make a commitment to the anti-bias approach for it to be successful. This can be done in a number of ways, as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2
ACHIEVING STAFF COMMITMENT

1. Staff development/inservice programs, preferably workshops, which help staff to examine their own values and attitudes as well as describing the philosophy and goals behind anti-bias programming.
2. Staff meetings to establish general principles, and planning long- and short-term goals to help them incorporate this approach in their program.
3. Regular staff meetings to discuss the implementation of the program and the particular strategies to be used.
4. Continuous evaluation of staff and program.
5. Reading publications such as Derman-Sparks and the ABC Task Force, *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children*; Stonehouse, *Opening the Doors*; and Playworks, *Caring for All.*
6. Other readings on specific areas where there is a need for further understanding, such as how to present the Aboriginal culture in positive ways, consistent with how the local Aboriginal community wish to be presented.
7. The formulation of a statement of philosophy (in partnership with parents) which becomes part of the service policy document, available to all staff and parents.
8. Staff employment policies which model best practice in terms of equal opportunity and affirmative action.

Any statement of philosophy should clearly state that prejudice and discrimination are not acceptable. If any staff consistently discriminate in their work with children and families or other staff, we should not ignore it, but deal with it through processes established in service policy documents.

Step 3:
Match the program to the needs of the children and families

Any program should be based on the needs of children, but individual children bring to a service a family background and family values which have an impact on their development and on what we, as professionals, need to provide to further their development. Sometimes there are conflicting values which have to be worked out in a way that leaves the relationship between staff and parents intact and which acknowledges the different views in positive ways.

Recently in a child care centre, staff voiced concern about one of the babies who had on so many layers of clothing that they wondered how it would learn to walk. The centre coordinator gently pointed out that there were a few other children from similar backgrounds who also wore many layers of clothing, and they appeared to have had no difficulty in mastering the skill of walking. She suggested that perhaps the children were used to extra clothing and did not find it as restrictive and uncomfortable as staff assumed, and that it was the parents' wish that the child remain dressed in this way.

In this example, the staff's attitudes and values were clearly conflicting with those of the parents; but with the coordinator's help, staff realised that the family's wishes should be respected. However, in some other circumstances, the coordinator might feel that both she and the parents could discuss and negotiate on an issue where there were conflicting views which compromised safety or the quality of the program, and come to an agreement acceptable to both.

Parents are the experts on their children, and valuing the family background should be evident in what we provide in the service environment and program, so that it is suited to each child's individual needs. For example, if we provide a music tape in a child's home language which is other than English, we are also giving the other children an experience of another culture. If we see children in the home corner acting out very stereotyped mother and father roles, we can acknowledge to the children that this is what may happen in some families, but in other families perhaps father looks after the baby while mother goes to work, so that again we are broadening children's knowledge and experience of different families and different lifestyles.

The program should reflect the diversity of family types, their lifestyles, their background, experiences and cultures. Broadening children's views of families is not in any way comparing one background to the detriment of another; rather, it is encouraging children's responsiveness to other ideas and other values so that they gain increasing understanding of diversity and how positive it can be.

Learning and education, including early childhood education, has traditionally been geared to a white, middle-class, Anglo-Saxon, two-parent culture. This has effectively excluded a large section of the community from full participation in early childhood services. One of the aims of early childhood education should be to help children appreciate and value the whole range of families and lifestyles, and to engage parents' help in providing a program which is individual to children and their family backgrounds. For this we need a partnership with parents.

Some ways that we can include the family in the program and acknowledge and respect them as part of the program are described in Table 3.

TABLE 3
PARTNERSHIPS WITH PARENTS

1. Develop new policies and introduce new ideas with the help and expertise of parents.
2. Give information to parents about the program and a rationale of why and what is provided in the program.
3. Involve parents in the introduction of an anti-bias approach to the service program.
4. Gain information from parents on each child's needs, interests and routines, such as eating and sleeping, to help provide for each child's individuality.
5. Encourage parent input into the program — use their expertise, but allow their participation to be at a level with which they feel comfortable.
6. Obtain parents' ideas and help in selecting culturally relevant materials and providing culturally relevant experiences.
7. Obtain parents' ideas and help in providing for children with special needs, perhaps with extra equipment or changing the environment to suit the children so that they are allowed full participation in the program.
8. Show acceptance of all parents and family members. Use interpreters if needed to communicate more effectively.
9. Show the diversity of families using the service within the program, through photographs, displays, posters, newsletters or through encouraging interactions between families.
10. Take positive action to resolve any exclusion of parents by other parents or staff.

Step 4:
Evaluate the here and now and continuous evaluation

Once staff and parents make a commitment to an anti-bias approach, and have information on the principles involved and an understanding of their role in the process, there should be an evaluation of what the program is providing at present. The program is not only the experiences provided, but the total environment, including materials, routines, interactions with children, and relationships with parents and with other staff.

Evaluation should ask some key questions and examine some key issues. Many staff inservices, through staff development on the anti-bias curriculum, have used the checklist in Stonehouse (1991) to evaluate the cultural relevance of their programs. Even those who, prior to completing this task, thought that they at least provided the cultural component of an anti-bias program were surprised by the gaps that the checklist revealed.

The following questions should be the starting point of evaluation of the program: Is the program meeting the needs of every child and family using this service? Is the program maximising opportunities for every child? Is an anti-bias environment being promoted?

Materials/equipment and experiences

Early childhood staff need to assess the materials and equipment used, checking whether books, puzzles and posters depict a range of diversity: pictures of people of different races, different abilities, different ages, and males and females in non-traditional roles; stories about different family structures and family traditions; stories including people of different races, classes, ages and abilities.

Some materials may need adjuncts in order for them to be used in a non-stereotypic way — for example, block areas which are most often used by boys might be made attractive for girls by the addition of cushions, rugs and doll's house furniture. The building of a house from blocks might also be enhanced by the adult discussing a variety of housing and shelters, and putting up posters of different types of housing in this area. In this way we are encouraging the use of the material in non-stereotyped ways and increasing children's awareness of the fact that not all families live in a house like theirs. We might read books which depict different types of houses and shelters, and different lifestyles, within their own and other cultures.

The commitment to planning for individual children, rather than using a 'thematic' approach, also encourages us to think of the needs of the individual child and so we are more likely to implement experiences for that child which are developmentally, culturally, age, ability and interest appropriate.

Table 4 lists some points to consider when evaluating materials and experiences for their usefulness in helping to implement an anti-bias program.

TABLE 4

SOME POINTS TO CONSIDER IN THE CHOICE OF MATERIALS AND EXPERIENCES FOR AN ANTI-BIAS PROGRAM

1. They should enhance children's awareness of Australia's cultural diversity.
2. They should help to reinforce children's own cultural identity and background.
3. They should present positive images of other cultures, including the Aboriginal culture.
4. They should represent different types of people, families and lifestyles within the community.
5. They should be gender inclusive.
6. They should be disability inclusive.
7. They should be accessible to all children and should allow the participation of all children.
8. They should not reflect or reinforce stereotypes.
9. They should encourage children's critical thinking about difference.
10. They should not focus on 'exotic' materials and experiences of diverse cultures, but should represent everyday life.
11. They should encourage children's empathy and awareness of others and their feelings.
12. They should allow children to compare and also to discover similarities and differences in a variety of ways.
13. They should enhance children's sense of individual value and worth.
14. They should represent and value children's own backgrounds.

The materials and experiences used in providing an anti-bias program should not be used as an 'add on'. They need to be included within the daily program and be integrated into children's individual and group experiences.

We must realise that it is not possible to change absolutely every book or other materials all at once. With older children, we can often use the stereotyped image as the starting point for discussion.

An initial evaluation of the program is essential so that there is an awareness of what materials and experiences are already being offered to children, what use is being made of those materials and whether they promote an anti-bias approach. This initial evaluation will also reveal what needs to be changed immediately and what can be changed over time.

Evaluation should be ongoing, incorporating new ideas and new materials. When new ideas or materials are tried out, they might be used again or discarded depending on how they are meeting children's needs. Some unsatisfactory materials might be kept because they provide stimulus for discussion about anti-bias issues.

Staff–child interactions

Positive interactions between staff and children are crucial in developing an anti-bias program.

Many of the incidental happenings during the course of a daily program are opportunities for staff to further children's learning and development. The pertinent open-ended question, the reminder about limits, the discussion about other ways to do things, the encouraging phrases, and the acknowledgement of feelings are an integral part of the program and should be used to reinforce positive attitudes towards diversity. Staff should also use those incidental happenings (teachable moments) to challenge stereotypes, bias and negative labelling.

With an anti-bias approach, we need to ask ourselves about the inclusive quality of our interactions and if we are inadvertently, or otherwise, promoting stereotypes in our interactions with children. For example, often girls are greeted in the morning with 'what a lovely dress' and boys with comments such as 'you've brought your truck to play with in the sandpit'. These comments can give girls and boys very strong messages that girls are more valued for their appearance, and that boys might be expected to play with trucks. The stereotype that women are judged by their appearance is one that many women are constantly battling in our society.

Evaluation of interactions can be very confronting, because many of the biased interactions with children are not intentional or even realised. For example, we may have lesser expectations of a child with special needs and be overprotective and intrusive in the child's activities in our desire to help the child. Rather than see the child as a child first, there is a focus on the disability.

In an anti-bias program, staff have to confront situations where children are excluding other children or showing unfairness or bias towards other children. We should not ignore situations. We need sensitively to deal with these behaviours and use positive guidance techniques which leave children with a clear message that we should respect other people. The person being treated unfairly is also deserving of respect, just as you are, and this is a place where we find delight in difference.

If a book portrays a child in a wheelchair looking on as other children play with a ball, this could be used as an example of exclusion. We could ask, 'How would you feel if you were that person?' and 'What would you do to help that person join in your game?'

At the water play trough, a child may say to another child with olive or black skin, 'You can't use the water, you've got dirty hands.' This is an important incidental learning opportunity for both of these children if picked up and developed — to help the one child deal with biased behaviour from another, and to help the other child respect and value others regardless of difference.

In the staff commitment phase, we need to be helped to prepare for possible changes in some of the ways we interact with children, and there should be discussion about how challenging and confronting this can be.

Routines and transitions

In the task of trying to keep the program running smoothly over morning and afternoon tea times, lunchtime, and bathroom and sleep times, the importance of routines and transitions, as learning times, can be overlooked. In programs where these routines are less regimented, there appears to be more opportunity to acknowledge and follow through on individual and cultural differences.

Meal times should reflect the cultural identities of the children, but should also reflect the diversity of the community. Staff should consider how they can do this in terms of the menu, the utensils used and the presentation of the food.

Family values and religious requirements also need to be considered in this part of the program. The social aspect of these times is an important learning opportunity — to discuss these differences with children can reinforce for some of the children that food from their culture is also valued and respected.

With an anti-bias program, it is also important to consider how some families may feel about 'food play' with food that is a staple part of their diet. Families who may originally have come from a country where food is scarce could be very offended by seeing food used for the purpose of play.

At sleep time, where children do sleep, the routines and rituals carried out before sleep are also very individual. The children and their sleep rituals should be considered within the context of their family background. For example, one centre could not get a new four-month-old child to settle and the child was getting more and more upset. They discovered from the mother that in her culture the child was carried in a sling almost every minute of the day, unless put down for a long sleep and even then never in a room alone. We are one of the few cultures in the world who do not carry children like this and who expect them to sleep alone in a darkened room. Obviously the staff in the centre could not carry the child all day, but they obtained the sling from the parents and, initially, used it a substantial amount of the time, but then reduced this so that eventually the child did not need to be carried all the time.

Continuous evaluation of every area of the program is very time consuming if looking at other than very general aspects. The specific nature of the anti-bias approach requires a considered and thoughtful response, not a hurried one.

Evaluation is more easily achieved if the program is divided into different areas and each one can become the focus for the evaluation on a rotational basis. Evaluation and subsequent change is a long-term process.

Step 5: Plan for the individual child in an anti-bias program

Because our society, our communities, our families and children are all diverse, the planning of an anti-bias program within early childhood settings must reflect that diversity, as well as the different personalities, temperaments and levels of development of the children involved. Our knowledge of child development and of what is appropriate and quality practice is crucial in enabling us to plan for the individual needs of each child.

We should be aware of providing children with a sense of their own value and the knowledge that they are accepted for who they are. We should encourage children to develop attributes such as a strong and positive self-esteem and identity, empathy for others, a sense of fairness and equity and the ability to defend their own rights and those of others. Many of these attributes may be less easily measured than a child's gross motor development or language development, but few would argue their importance to a child's overall development and well-being. They are examples of the behaviours we would observe when planning an anti-bias approach for individual children.

The starting point in any program is observation. Table 5 details how we might plan for an individual child in our anti-bias program.

TABLE 5
PLANNING FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

1. Make observations in each area of development – social/emotional, cognitive, linguistic and physical. Some particular behaviours you might look at are:
    - Self-esteem;
    - Empathy for others;
    - Assertiveness;
    - Recognition of similarities and differences;
    - Use of home language;
    - Communication with others;
    - Biased behaviour;
    - Recognition of unfairness;
    - Cultural identity;
    - Acceptance of change;
    - Acceptance of difference; and
    - Ability to see other points of view.
2. Collect information about the child's family background, interests and other environmental factors.
3. Analyse the information from steps 1 and 2 and identify the child's area(s) of need. Perhaps the child might need extra stimulation or extra help in one particular area.
4. Formulate a long-term goal for the child in the area(s) defined in step 3. Refer to Table 1 for suggestions for long-term goals.
5. Using the long-term goal, formulate one or two specific behavioural goals which the child will be able to achieve in the short-term.
6. Formulate strategies to help the child achieve the goals identified in step 5. For example:
    - Set up appropriate experiences, activities or routines;
    - Identify any adult reactions which may occur; and
    - Identify potential interactions with other children.
7. Evaluate your observations. How did the child behave, react, participate? What was achieved? Were the goals achieved wholly or partly? Was it necessary to change or modify your strategies?
8. Begin the cycle again: observe, set more goals, formulate more strategies to achieve the goals and evaluate the process.

The following example describes how an individual plan might look. It is based on a real life situation and uses one of the long-term goals suggested in Table 1.

Observations

Social/emotional Four-year-old Tran plays by herself both indoors and outdoors. She plays alongside other children but makes no attempt to join them. When Elsa spoke to her, she quickly looked away.

Cognitive development Tran spends a lot of time at puzzles and she has mastered the harder ones. She paints recognisable figures and writes her own name at the top of her paintings. She concentrates well in solitary tasks.

Language development Tran answers when spoken to but rarely initiates conversation. She understands verbal instructions. She speaks very little with the other children.

Physical development Tran avoids gross motor activities and needs to be persuaded to use climbing equipment, where she constantly seeks adult help.

She draws using a mature pincer grasp and has progressed to using finer tools for drawing and painting.

Information on background and interests

Tran's home language is Vietnamese. Her parents both work in the paid workforce. She has a baby brother in the centre. Tran's family have no other relatives in Australia. Her mother and father speak only a little English. Tran enjoys singing along with tapes at home.

Analysis of the observations and information

From the information it would appear that Tran, even though very skilled in fine motor skills, lacks confidence in her ability to use her gross motor skills. Lack of confidence and low self-esteem appear to have had an impact on her relationship with the other children, as does her lack of confidence in speaking English. Tran appears more confident and relaxed in her home language.

Long-term goal

To maximise Tran's self-esteem in her cultural identity. See Table 1.

Short-term goals

1. For Tran to participate in at least two activities each day which reinforce her cultural background and language.
2. For Tran to communicate with at least one other child each day.

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Strategies

Experience 1 Doll washing with dolls with a range of racial features (including a doll with Asian features).

Adult role Comment on similarities and differences and compare hair and skin.

Use questions, especially open-ended questions, and involve other children in conversation and discussion with Tran.

Interactions Encourage at least one other child to participate in the experience.

Experience 2 Place two books on the bookshelf written in Vietnamese with an English translation.

Adult role Ask the staff member who speaks Vietnamese to read the book in Vietnamese to Tran and then to Tran and a small group of children. Next read the book in English and ask the children to recall the story or parts of it. Follow through with discussion on the differences in language and lifestyles.

Interactions Tran to be by herself for the story and then in a small group.

Further observations to determine what is happening Tran initiated a conversation with another child after reading the story in Vietnamese. This child could be included in some of the other activities planned for Tran.

Evaluation

The short-term goals have been partially achieved, but there is a need to keep working on both the short-term and long-term goals identified for Tran.

This individualised anti-bias approach will allow you to develop a program to suit a whole group of children. Begin with individual planning for two or three children each week and build on this to develop a group program. You might use Table 1 to formulate some long-term goals for the group.

Using this approach should heighten awareness and allow the integration of goals based on anti-bias principles to become normal practice when planning for children.

Conclusion

A successful anti-bias program incorporates the ideas discussed in this chapter. The quality of the program is what seems to stand out, not the fact that an anti-bias component has been added. A systematic approach to planning and implementing such a program is needed. The value basis of this approach may make some colleagues uncomfortable, but we cannot meet individual children's needs or maximise opportunities for all children unless we adopt such an approach. By not including an anti-bias aspect we are in danger of excluding numbers of children from full participation in early childhood programs.

We cannot make the necessary changes to the program unless we have done our homework first. It would defeat the whole purpose of an anti-bias approach if we started changing everything without being aware of why the change is necessary and how best to do it. The anti-bias approach is a dynamic approach, constantly evolving and changing in order to maximise opportunities for all children. As Derman-Sparks and the ABC Task Force (1989, p. 5.) said, 'The notion of empowerment — of people having the intellectual and emotional ability to confront oppression and work together to create a more just society — had a strong influence on conceptualizing anti-bias curriculum goals and methodology'. The opportunity to introduce the anti-bias approach in early childhood service programs is a privilege as well as a professional responsibility and should be applied carefully and thoughtfully.

For further thought and discussion

1. Describe an experience which would help to reinforce a child's cultural identity.
2. Give an example of how you would include positive images of the Australian Aboriginal culture in an early childhood program.
3. Describe an experience you could include in your program to encourage children's positive attitudes towards difference.
4. Describe an experience you could provide in the program which would maximise equality of opportunity for all children, whatever their gender.
5. What would you do in the following situation? Four-year-old Amy tells four-year-old Timmy to dry the dishes in home corner. Timmy replies, 'Daddies don't do dishes.' What would you do immediately, and what ongoing plans would you make in the program?
6. What would you do in the following situation? Five-year-old Ali points to Eliza, who has cerebral palsy, and says: 'She's dumb, she can't talk.' What would you do immediately, and what ongoing plans would you make in the program?

References

Derman-Sparks, L. & the ABC Task Force. 1989, *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children*, National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington, DC.

Stonehouse, A. 1991, *Opening the Doors, Childcare in a Multicultural Society*, Australian Early Childhood Association, Canberra.

Playworks. 1993, *Caring for All*, Playworks for Department of Human Services and Health, Melbourne.

Definitions of Terms

Aborigine: a noun which refers to an indigenous group of any country. In this book the term 'Australian Aborigine' is used, but it is acknowledged that there are groups who call themselves Murri, Koori and Nungga.

ABS: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Ageism: any attitude, action or institutional practice backed up by institutional power that subordinates people because of their age.

Anti-bias: an active/activist approach to challenging prejudice, stereotyping and bias. In a society in which institutional structures create and maintain bias, it is not sufficient to be non-biased (and also highly unlikely), nor is it sufficient to be an observer. It is necessary for each individual to actively intervene, to challenge and counter the personal and institutional behaviours that perpetuate oppression on the grounds of difference. (From Derman-Sparks, L. & the ABC Task Force. 1989, *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children*, National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington, DC.)

Assimilation: the process of becoming similar — by which a variant group adopts the values of a dominant group. This can be voluntary or by government policy.

Bias: any attitude, belief or feeling that results in, and helps to justify unfair treatment because of gender, culture, race, sex, class, family, age or ability. (From Derman-Sparks, L. & the ABC Task Force. 1989, *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children*, National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington, DC.)

Cultural pluralism: recognises the importance of concepts such as ethnicity, ethnic identity and membership of an ethnic group. In a culturally pluralist society, people from ethnic minorities are able to access education and jobs and are able to participate in the political process in the same manner as members of the dominant culture.

Early childhood: the age range birth to eight years.

Early childhood services or settings: this terminology is inclusive of all education and child care services offered for children between birth and eight years. In this publication we recognise 'out of school hours care' as one of these services.

Enculturation: the process whereby children acquire the language, behaviours, values and attitudes of their cultural group and come to see themselves as members of that group.

Ethnic group: a group of people having a distinct sociocultural and political identity.

Ethnocentrism: the common belief that the beliefs and values of one's own group are superior to those of other groups.

Evaluative judgements: differences are judged as either good (positive) or bad (negative) as children incorporate adult attitudes into their perceptions of people.

Functional specialisation: the tendency for bilinguals to use a particular language for specific activities.

Gender: learned behaviour associated with femininity or masculinity as against biological differences between females and males. (From MacNaughton, G. 1993, *Equal Play, Equal Work: An Early Childhood Gender Equity Resource Booklet*, Health and Community Services, Victoria.)

Gender identity: self-awareness and acceptance of being either female or male. (From MacNaughton, G. 1993, *Equal Play, Equal Work: An Early Childhood Gender Equity Resource Booklet*, Health and Community Services, Victoria.)

Gendering: processes involved in being, becoming, thinking and feeling what it means to be female or male. (From MacNaughton, G. 1993, *Equal Play, Equal Work: An Early Childhood Gender Equity Resource Booklet*, Health and Community Services, Victoria.)

Gender role: behaviours and attitudes associated in a particular society with being female or male. (From MacNaughton, G. 1993, *Equal Play, Equal Work: An Early Childhood Gender Equity Resource Booklet*, Health and Community Services, Victoria.)

Handicappism: any attitude, action or institutional practice that subordinates people due to their disability. Handicappist institutional practices prevent integration of people with disabilities into the mainstream of society and keep them socially and economically oppressed. (From *Guidelines for Selecting Bias-Free Textbooks and Storybooks*, 1980, Council on Interracial Books for Children Inc, New York.)

Homophobia: a fear or hatred of gay men and lesbians backed up by institutional policies and power that discriminate against them. (From *Homophobia and Education*, 1983, Council on Interracial Books for Children Inc, New York.)

Linguicism: the ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups which are defined on the basis of language (i.e. of their mother tongue). (From Skutnabb-Kangas, T. 1988, 'Multilingualism and the education of minority children', in *Minority Education*, eds T. Skutnabb-Kangas & J. Cummins, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon, UK.)

Monocultural: characteristic of, or having to do with, one culture, usually the dominant culture.

Multicultural education: an educational concept that addresses the diversity of Australian society. In practice, it accepts, respects and encourages this diversity, rejects racism, prejudice and discrimination and promotes equity for all children in relation to access and outcomes.

Multiculturalism: the existence of a number of distinct ethnic or cultural groups within one nation-state. It can be a matter of statistical fact and/or promotion by government policy.

NESB: Non-English Speaking Background.

Non-sexist: practices and attitudes that do not see that a person's worth and capabilities are determined by their biological sex. Women and men, girls and boys are equal and should be treated equally. (From MacNaughton, G. 1993, *Equal Play*, *Equal Work: An Early Childhood Gender Equity Resource Booklet*, Health and Community Services, Victoria.)

Normalisation: a principle of enabling people with disabilities to have as similar as possible or the same options for living as experienced by other people in society. For children this means options for care, education, play, family life and enjoyment of childhood.

Patriarchy: a social organisation that regards the father or males as the head of the household. Family name and descent are passed on by the male line. Children take on the father's name.

Prejudice: prejudice means pre-judgement, making up one's mind about something, or someone, without sufficient information. Prejudices are usually negative, and can relate to differences in class, gender, ability, age, race, culture, language, family structure and religion. (From Arthur, L. et al. 1993, *Programming and Planning in Early Childhood Settings*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Sydney.)

Racism: any attitude, action or institutional practice backed up by institutional power that subordinates people because of their colour or culture. This includes the imposition of one ethnic group's culture in such a way as to withhold respect for, to demean or to destroy the culture of other races. (From *Guidelines for Selecting Bias-Free Textbooks and Storybooks*, 1980, Council on Interracial Books for Children Inc, New York.)

Sex discrimination: practices that put people at a disadvantage because of their sex. (From MacNaughton, G. 1993, *Equal Play, Equal Work: An Early Childhood Gender Equity Resource Booklet*, Health and Community Services, Victoria.)

Sex-role stereotypes: fixed ideas about the usual behaviours and abilities of one sex. (From MacNaughton, G. 1993, *Equal Play, Equal Work: An Early Childhood Gender Equity Resource Booklet*, Health and Community Services, Victoria.)

Sexism: any attitude, action or institutional practice backed up by institutional power that subordinates people because of their sex. (From *Guidelines for Selecting Bias-Free Textbooks and Storybooks*, 1980, Council on Interracial Books for Children Inc, New York.)

Stereotype: 1. the exaggerated belief associated with a particular characteristic or group. 2. an oversimplified generalisation about a particular group, race or sex, which usually carries derogatory implication. (From Derman-Sparks, L. & the ABC Task Force. 1989, *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children*, National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington, DC) 3. generalisations, usually fixed, about different groups of people. When we stereotype we assume that 'they' are like 'all the rest'. (From Arthur, L. et al. 1993, *Programming and Planning in Early Childhood Settings*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Sydney.)

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Australian Early Childhood Association

The Australian Early Childhood Association Inc. (AECA) is a national peak non-government organisation acting in the interests of young children aged from birth to eight years of age, and for older children in outside school hours care. AECA is based in Canberra, ACT.

AECA actively promotes the provision of high-quality services for all young children and their families, and supports the important role of parents in caring for their children.

AECA also has an important role as the national umbrella organisation for Children's Services. AECA sees this task as supporting the advocacy role of the child care sector as a whole, without undermining the rights of each specialist organisation to operate and speak independently.

AECA is a leading specialist publisher of early childhood literature. AECA produces the *Australian Journal of Early Childhood, Every Child* magazine, the AECA Resource Book series, newsletter and special titles.

AECA also markets resources on early childhood topics from other companies and organisations.

For further information on AECA's resources

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The Anti-Bias Approach in Early Childhood is the first Australian text to use a wholly anti-bias approach to early childhood education. This innovative book addresses aspects of diversity such as gender, race and language within Australian society.

The Anti-Bias Approach in Early Childhood provides strategies for working with families and staff to challenge existing attitudes and practices.

Key features of the book include:

- Case studies showing anti-bias principles in action
- Practical guidelines for implementing an anti-bias curriculum
- Wide range of topics reflecting the diversity of Australian society
- Contributors offering a variety of anti-bias approaches
- Personal accounts of challenging and overcoming discrimination
- Questions at the end of each chapter.
- Glossary of key terms

The Anti-Bias Approach in Early Childhood is essential for early childhood practitioners concerned with eliminating discrimination and encouraging diversity in early childhood settings. It is a valuable learning tool for students in education and child care courses.

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The book includes a Foreword by Louise Derman-Sparks and members of the Anti-Bias Curriculum Task Force who developed the anti-bias approach in the United States.

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